

Perceived body image in long-term mindfulness practitioners

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The body image is the conscious visual representation of body parts' size and shape, and it reflects how one's own body is perceived. A distorted body image characterizes various psychiatric disorders, such as anorexia nervosa; however, even healthy individuals show distortions, for instance in estimating the length of their limbs. As body image, interoception, i.e., signals originating from within the body, contributes to experiencing one's own body. Findings from clinical and non-clinical populations suggest that subjects with higher interoception might represent their body more accurately. Practices which promote mind-body integration, such as the mindfulness meditation, are thought to favor interoceptive awareness. It is significant that mindfulness meditation promotes anatomo-functional changes of the insula, which is a relevant area for the interoceptive processing and the bodily representation. Many studies have been conducted on the relationship between mindfulness meditation and interoception. However, no study has investigated whether mindfulness meditation affects the body image, although gaining a deeper knowledge on this topic might be beneficial to understand the efficacy of mindfulness in managing conditions that involve body image distortions, such as eating disorders, and body dysmorphic disorder. In light of the available evidence, the research hypothesis posits that the body image of long-term practitioners of mindfulness is more accurate. In this study we show preliminary data on the body image of mindfulness practitioners and non-meditators, as measured with the body image task (BIT). Also, the link between practicing mindfulness meditation, interoception and body image is discussed.

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