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Relaxation response-based yoga improves functioning in young children with autism: A pilot study

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**Abstract**

**Objectives:** The study objectives were to develop and objectively assess the therapeutic effect of a novel movement-based complementary and alternative medicine approach for children with an autism-spectrum disorder (ASD).

**Design:** A within-subject analysis comparing pre- to post-treatment scores on two standard measures of childhood behavioral problems was used. **Settings and location:** The intervention and data analysis occurred at a tertiary care, medical school teaching hospital. **Subjects:** Twenty-four (24) children aged 3-16 years with a diagnosis of an ASD comprised the study group. **Intervention:** The efficacy of an 8-week multimodal yoga, dance, and music therapy program based on the relaxation response (RR) was developed and examined. **Outcome measures:** The study outcome was measured using The Behavioral Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2) and the Aberrant Behavioral Checklist (ABC). **Results:** Robust changes were found on the BASC-2, primarily for 5-12-year-old children. Unexpectedly, the post-treatment scores on the Atypicality scale of the BASC-2, which measures some of the core features of autism, changed significantly ( $p=0.003$ ). **Conclusions:** A movement-based, modified RR program, involving yoga and dance, showed efficacy in treating behavioral and some core features of autism, particularly for latency-age children. © Copyright 2011, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. 2011