

Perceived benefits of Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE) among people with multiple sclerosis – qualitative results from a pilot study

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Background, aim and methods

Background: Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE) is a series of exercises that activate reflexive muscle vibrations with the aim of releasing stress, tension and trauma. The method is used by psychologists in the Danish MS Society, and members have reported various benefits to their wellbeing and functioning. In the fall of 2018 we carried out a pilot study to assess possible outcome measures for evaluating the effects of TRE on people with MS (PwMS).

Aim: This study aimed to capture the experiences of nine PwMS who had followed a nine-week TRE program as part of a pilot intervention study. The primary focus was on the experienced effects of TRE.

Methods: This qualitative study was nested in a pilot-study examining possible outcome measures for a TRE intervention among PwMS. Semi-structured interviews were carried out post intervention with all nine participants (5 women, mean age 51,6 years) who completed the nine-week TRE program. The analysis focused on the participants' experiences of the effects of TRE on physical and mental wellbeing and functioning. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and meaning units were extracted and categorized using the NVivo 12 software package.

Main perceived effects of TRE

Better sleep (5 participants)

Reduced tension (5 participants)

"(TRE gives me) a feel-good sensation of being present in my body, of less tension in head and body. I'm feeling more 'loose'"

"After about a month I could feel a difference. I was able to sleep for longer stretches of time. It has an effect on my sleep. I sleep better at night after having practiced (TRE) (...) Now I'm able to sleep for maybe six hours before I have to get up and go to the bathroom"

Better mood/improved resilience (5 participants)

"I feel like my head has become lighter. I don't worry as much, don't let things bother me as much. I feel like I am becoming the person I used to be a long time ago – that I am more sort of worry-free."

Improved bladder function (4 participants)

"Suddenly I could go to the bathroom anywhere. I have had a traumatic relationship with bathroom visits. But now I am able to pee even in bathrooms I don't know. I haven't been able to do that for years..."

Results/conclusion

Results: Seven participants experienced positive effects that they ascribed to TRE. One had experienced positive effects but was unsure whether it was due to the exercises. One participant had not experienced any positive (or negative) effects.

Participants experienced positive effects in the following areas: improved sleep (n = 5), better mood/improved resilience (n = 5), reduced tension (n = 5), improved bladder functioning (n = 4), decreased spasticity (n = 3), improved gait (n = 3), and increased level of energy immediately after the exercises (n = 3). Other benefits mentioned were decreased pain, improved balance, improved bowel function, and improved sex life.

Conclusion: The results indicate that some PwMS experience a wide array of physical and mental benefits from TRE. Held together with the quantitative findings of the pilot-study, these results should inform further research on TRE for PwMS.

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