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Mindfulness-based health-enhancement and carbon footprint reduction

Background: Greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are causing climate change. Behaviors including transportation, diet, and energy use influence societal processes that release greenhouse gas pollutants, but are also related to health and well-being. Replacing automobile driving with walking and cycling, for instance, may increase health and well-being while lowering environmental impact. Mindfulness-based practices can be effective in modifying health-related behaviors.

Specific Aims: (1) To pilot test a mindfulness-based behavioral program aimed at: (a) enhancement of health and well-being, and (b) reduction in carbon footprint; (2) carry out a randomized controlled trial to assess impact on health, well-being, and carbon footprint.

Approach: Our multi-disciplinary team has designed an 8-week mindfulness-based behavioral training program. The Mindful Climate Action (MCA) program aims to: (1) teach climate change core knowledge, (2) decrease household energy use, (3) reduce automobile and air transport, (4) increase active transport and physical activity, (5) modify dietary impact on carbon footprint, (6) reduce unnecessary purchasing and consumption, and (7) improve personal health and well-being.

Significance: Despite known behavioral contributions towards climate change, little work has been done to understand and modify the individual-level choices and behaviors involved. Mindfulness-based trainings are rapidly proving successful for behavioral modification and health-enhancement. Behavioral training leading to increased active transport (more exercise), healthier plant-based diets, and reduced energy consumption and unnecessary purchasing could yield significant benefits in terms of both sustainability and personal health and well-being.

Biography

Bruce Barrett is a board-certified, a practicing Family Physician and tenured research Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has published more than 80 peer-reviewed scientific papers, and has directed four randomized controlled trials funded by the US National Institutes of Health, with more than 1,500 subjects. Two of his trials assess the impact of training in mindfulness-based stress reduction on the immune system and acute respiratory infection. He has led the Mindful Climate Action group since its inception in 2014.

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