

### The Focus Project

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**Project Description:** The Focus Project, funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the NIH, is a randomized controlled trial to test the efficacy of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) intervention to remediate HIV treatment challenges. The MBSR course consists of a standardized series of 8 weekly sessions of 2.5 to 3 hours. There are daily home assignments of formal and informal practice. Participants take part in a series of research interviews to evaluate the impact of the intervention.

MBSR is a program that provides systematic training in mindfulness meditation as a self-regulation approach to reduction of stress and medical and psychological symptoms. MBSR draws on centuries old meditation practices, particularly Buddhist Vipassana and Zen practices, but adapts these practices to a Western audience. It aims to teach participants to respond to stressful situation “mindfully”- a state in which one focuses on the present moment, accepting and acknowledging it without getting caught up in thoughts that are about the situation or emotional reactions--to enable people to respond to the situation making conscious choices instead of automatic responses.

The study will be conducted at CAPS and the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine.

**Significance:** Challenges associated with antiretroviral therapy for HIV, such as treatment side effects, impact quality of life and adherence to care, and they influence decisions about health care. Decreases in medical and psychological symptoms have been observed following MBSR in a wide range of illness contexts, but the approach has not been applied to HIV. Addressing HIV treatment side effects through MBSR is a logical yet untested next step in complementary and alternative medicine research.

**Project End Date:** October 2008