

Abstract

Development of an Interdisciplinary, Mind-Body Medicine Self-help Group Program for Post-COVID-19 Syndrome: Intervention Design and Feasibility of the NASH Randomized Controlled Trial

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Background: Patients suffering from post-COVID-19 syndrome often struggle to find effective treatments for persisting or newly developed symptoms after their acute infection. This is complicated by a still unknown and highly individual, multi-factorial pathogenesis. In such cases, extending pathogenic approaches by salutogenic ones may be promising. Thus, we designed a mind-body-medicine group program and tested it for feasibility.

Methods: Based on the established MICOM program, we developed a 10-week group concept combining elements of mind-body-medicine, Self-Help strategies from NAturopathy (NASH) and Traditional European Medicine as well as ear-acupuncture. The program lasted 6 hours/week and included medical group visits, behavioral chance processes and complementary self-help units. We tested this program in addition to treatment as usual against treatment as usual alone within a randomized controlled trial.

Results: The NASH-study started in April 2023. With currently N=83 randomized of

initially 86 calculated patients (age: 50.9 ± 12.9 , 20.5% male), recruitment was feasible. The overall high attendance of 7.5 ± 3.3 days of N=52 patients who finished the study yet also ensure the execution of the intervention according to protocol. With regular breaks, patients were very well able to complete all treatment modules and stay for the full 6-hour day. Dropout rates (N=4 versus N=3) as well as reasons for drop-out were comparable between groups and not associated with the respective study intervention. Beside the social support within a group of equally affected people, effective treatment mechanisms reported by the study patients included: pacing, mindful stress regulation, hydrotherapy, plant-based nutrition, and ear acupuncture.

Conclusion: In patients suffering from post-COVID-19, the NASH protocol is feasible and well accepted. Final data of the randomized trial will reveal, whether the intervention will be effective in reducing post-COVID-19 symptom burden.

Keywords: MICOM, Mind-Body-Medicine, Post-COVID, Traditional European Medicine, self-help strategies, self-efficacy