



**Hypertension Analysis of stress Reduction using
Mindfulness meditatiON and Yoga (The HARMONY Study):
study protocol of a randomized control trial
[ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT00825526]**

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8 **Hypertension Analysis of stress Reduction using Mindfulness meditation and Yoga (The**
9 **HARMONY Study): study protocol of a randomized control trial [ClinicalTrials.gov**
10 **Identifier: NCT00825526]**
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12 complementary medicine, meditation.
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ABSTRACT

Hypertension (HTN) is a leading risk factor for preventable cardiovascular disease with over 1 in 5 adults affected worldwide. Lifestyle modification is a key strategy for the prevention and treatment of HTN. Stress has been associated with greater cardiovascular risk and stress management is a recommended intervention for hypertensives. Stress reduction through relaxation therapies have been shown to have an effect on human physiology including lowering blood pressure (BP). However, individualized behavioural interventions are resource intensive and group stress management approaches have not been validated for reducing HTN. The HARMONY study is a pilot randomized controlled trial designed to determine if mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR), a standardized group therapy, is an effective intervention for lowering BP in stage-1 unmedicated hypertensives. Men and women unmedicated for HTN with mean daytime ambulatory blood pressure (ABP) \geq 135/85 mmHg or 24 hour ABP \geq 130/80 mmHg were included in the study. Subjects were randomized to receive MBSR immediately or after a wait-list control period. The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour ABP. The primary objective of the HARMONY study is to compare ABP between the treatment and wait-list control arm at the 12 week post-baseline primary assessment period. Results from this study will determine if MBSR is an effective intervention for lowering BP in early unmedicated hypertensives. This research project was approved by the Sunnybrook Research Ethics Board (Toronto, Canada) and the University Health Network Research Ethics Board (Toronto, Canada). Planned analyses are in full compliance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Data collection will be completed by early spring 2012. Primary and secondary analysis will commence immediately after data monitoring is completed; dissemination plans include preparing publications for submission during the summer of 2012. This study is registered with

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3 clinicaltrials.gov (NCT00825526).
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For peer review only

INTRODUCTION

Based on an annual consensus conference reviewing the world literature including the Cochrane Collaboration databases, the Canadian Hypertension Education Program recommends lifestyle modification as a key strategy for the prevention and treatment of hypertension[1]. Over 5 million Canadians, part of a worldwide epidemic, are hypertensive[2].[3] Data extrapolated from large population surveys and prospective studies[4,5] show that approximately 250,000 Canadians with high-normal blood pressure (SBP 120-139 or DBP 80-89 mmHg) will develop full-blown high blood pressure every year (BP \geq 140/90 mmHg) – putting them at higher risk for heart attack and stroke, necessitating the use of medications in most of them. Preventing and controlling hypertension is one of the most cost effective strategies for reducing the global burden of premature cardiovascular disease and death[6]. Reducing systolic blood pressure by just 3 mmHg in the general population has the potential to reduce stroke mortality by 8% and coronary artery disease mortality by 5%[7,8]. The published findings of the *InterStroke* study, one of the largest studies of its type in the world, concluded definitively that uncontrolled hypertension is the single most influential risk factor for stroke[9].

Stress has been associated with greater cardiovascular risk and consideration of stress management is a recommended intervention for hypertensives[1]. However, specific stress management approaches are not well validated for reducing hypertension[10-12]. Stress management therapies can be differentiated based on their approach and delivery: single- or multi-component approach and individualized or group delivery. Certain therapeutic approaches have been efficacious for reducing blood pressure in hypertensive subjects: transcendental meditation (a single-component, individualized therapy), cognitive behavioral therapy (a multi-

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3 component, individualized therapy) and, more recently, contemplative meditation[13] (a multi-
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5 component, group therapy).
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8 Transcendental meditation (TM) is a standardized form of meditation where an individual
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10 repeats a mantra to move the mind towards a state of greater relaxation and bliss[10]. Evidence
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12 indicates that single-component interventions like TM are efficacious in some conditions[14-19]
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14 including hypertension[20], with possible long term effects[17]. The blood pressure lowering
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16 effect of TM has been further supported by two meta-analyses, each suggesting TM can reduce
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18 both systolic and diastolic blood pressure[21,22]. However, other meta-analyses have suggested
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20 that the available clinical trials had significant “methodological weaknesses and [were]
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22 potentially biased by the affiliation of authors to the TM organization”[10]; thus, one must
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24 proceed with caution when evaluating if TM has a cumulative positive effect on lowering blood
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26 pressure[10]. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches subjects to be aware of stressors, to re-
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28 evaluate negative life events and to decrease sympathetic arousal. In a carefully controlled trial,
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30 Linden et al demonstrated that CBT decreased blood pressure in hypertensive participants[23].
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32 While CBT, a multi-component individualized therapy, has demonstrated efficacy in treating
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34 hypertension the cost of administering this one-on-one therapy presents a significant barrier to its
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36 widespread use. Contemplative meditation has demonstrated promising results however the
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38 limited research on the topic indicates that more work must be done before final conclusions can
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40 be drawn[13].
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48 Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), like CBT, is a multi-component therapy
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50 that encourages participants to achieve results by changing their thought patterns[24]. However,
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52 unlike CBT, MBSR is a standardized group therapy which can be delivered to a heterogeneous
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54 population. It is now available for stress reduction through some community and hospital
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3 alternative medicine programs and in Ontario it is covered in part by the Ontario Health
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5 Insurance Plan. While CBT can be viewed as an acute treatment option, MBSR works as both an
6
7 acute and preventative treatment as it provides participants with a new method of thinking and
8
9 functioning[24]. MBSR teaches participants to use mindfulness meditation as a strategy to adapt
10
11 to stress, pain and illness. In both clinical and non-clinical populations, MBSR has demonstrated
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13 benefits for: chronic pain[25-28], anxiety[29-33], depression[29,32-36], fibromyalgia[37-39],
14
15 binge-eating[40], psoriasis[41], psychological wellbeing, immune function and cortisol levels in
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17 cancer subjects[3,42-52], psychological well-being of cancer patient's partners[53] and glycemic
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19 control in diabetic populations[54]. Three meta-analyses[55-57] support the efficacy of MBSR
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21 for improving both physical and mental well-being in groups of subjects with mixed medical
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23 illness. Through its cognitive restructuring format, MBSR improves participants' resistance to
24
25 stress. It changes the participant's cognitive appraisals, reduces anxiety and enables the
26
27 participant to cope with future stressful situations more effectively[31].
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34 Preliminary information suggests that participating in an MBSR program also lowers
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36 blood pressure[23,42,54] and improves certain components of cardiovascular functioning[58].
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38 Barnes et al initiated one of the earliest studies investigating MBSR and blood pressure;
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40 compared to control, those who participated in a two month meditation intervention based on
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42 MBSR techniques demonstrated lower systolic blood pressure as measured by an automated
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44 device: -4 mmHg (intervention) compared to +2 mmHg (control)[59]. A follow-up study using
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46 ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM) also found significant differences in blood
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48 pressure reduction for the meditation group at specific time periods (e.g. after school)[60]. In an
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50 abstract, Van Wielingen reported that breast cancer patients who participated in MBSR had
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52 lower automated home blood pressure compared to those on wait list control[61]. Examining the
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3 treatment group alone, those with higher blood pressure at baseline demonstrated a greater
4 decrease in systolic blood pressure compared to those with lower systolic blood pressure at
5 baseline[61]. A similar treatment effect was described by Linden in subjects also starting with
6 higher blood pressure levels[62]. Two studies by Carlson et al demonstrated high rates of MBSR
7 class attendance, compliance and home meditation[43,44], with the follow-up study reporting
8 consistent drops in clinic blood pressure persisting up to one year[42]. A randomized controlled
9 trial of an abbreviated 6 week program using MBSR principles for pain tolerance in
10 normotensive university students found improved pain tolerance and lower diastolic blood
11 pressure in both the treatment and control groups[63]. These early studies point towards a blood
12 pressure lowering effect from MBSR. However, more rigorous methodology and larger sample
13 sizes are required to demonstrate whether MBSR can truly lower blood pressure.
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29 Before a large outcome study of MBSR for hypertension can be conducted, it is
30 necessary to collect data documenting efficacy and treatment effect. The HARMONY study, a
31 randomized controlled pilot trial investigating the use MBSR for unmedicated stage 1
32 hypertension, will test whether MBSR can significantly lower blood pressure. If found effective,
33 the HARMONY study will provide evidence to support a larger randomized controlled trial by
34 evaluating the feasibility and safety of MBSR as a complementary or alternative treatment for
35 hypertension.
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45 **METHODS**

46 **Study Design**

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48 The HARMONY study is a randomized, prospective, two-armed, wait-list controlled
49 pilot trial. The intervention is a standard 8 week MBSR program. The main outcome measure is
50 mean awake and 24 hour systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure. The study population
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3 consists of unmedicated men and women with stage 1 hypertension. Based on the power analysis
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5 the established recruitment goal was one hundred subjects. Baseline ambulatory blood pressure
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7 monitoring determined hypertensive eligibility. Screening and follow-up visits take place at
8
9 Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto Ontario. All MBSR therapy was conducted at the
10
11 University Health Network's Toronto General Hospital, Toronto Ontario.
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14 15 **Study Participants**

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17 Eligible participants were adults aged 20 to 75 years old who had a mean awake systolic
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19 or diastolic ambulatory blood pressure equal to or greater than 135 mmHg or 85 mmHg, or mean
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21 24 hour ambulatory blood pressure equal to or greater than 130 mmHg or 80 mmHg. Study
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23 participants consist of those who met the screening criteria, were willing and able to participate
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25 in the MBSR program, could attend all necessary study visits and complete all safety blood
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27 pressure evaluations. Further details regarding inclusion and exclusion criteria can be found in
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29 Table 1.
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34 **Table 1:** Study inclusion and exclusion criteria.
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36 Inclusion criteria:
37 38 39 1. Age 20 to 75 years. 40 41 2. Hypertension by ABPM at baseline (daytime \geq 135/85 mmHg or 24-hour ABPM \geq 42 43 130/80 mmHg). 44 45 3. Willing and able to participate in the MBSR program. 46 47 4. Willing to be followed for safety BP checks during the primary outcome period. 48 49 5. Willing to accept a possible waiting period of 12-weeks for MBSR. 50 51 6. Written informed consent. 52 53 54 55

7. Able to participate in mindfulness meditation program following screening ABPM.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Use of antihypertensive within 6 months of the screening ABPM.
2. Screening office BP > 180/100 mmHg and ABPM \geq 160/100 mmHg.
3. Diabetes.
4. Secondary hypertension.
5. Renal disease (GFR < 60 ml/min or overt nephropathy).
6. History of heart attack.
7. Stroke or TIA or
8. Re-vascularization procedure.
9. Active malignant disease (except non-melanoma skin cancer).
10. Epileptic seizure 6 months before the screening visit.
11. Congestive heart failure.
12. Severe liver disease.
13. Pregnancy or lactation period.
14. Participation in a clinical trial or receipt of investigational compound or treatment in the 3 months prior to the initial screening visit.
15. Planned elective surgery during the study period except for cataract surgery.
16. Inability or unwillingness to perform 3 ABPM over 6 months.

Study Recruitment

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3 The planned recruitment rate was 25 subjects every 6 months for a total of 100 subjects.
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5 Potential participants were identified through the clinical practices and referral bases of Dr's
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7 Abramson, Myers and Tobe. Additional successful screening strategies included public
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9 information sessions, advertisements in local news papers and hospital posters. Screening was
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11 performed using a validated automated blood pressure device, the BpTRU (VSM MedTech Ltd
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13 Coquitlam, Canada). Those with unmedicated office blood pressure $\geq 135/85$ mmHg were
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15 invited to the next step of screening of 24 hour ABPM.
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20 **Randomization and Study Blinding**

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22 Randomization to one of two study arms was done by sealed envelope method using the
23
24 permuted block design, with blocks of 2 and 4 subjects to maintain the adequacy of
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26 randomization. A computer program generated a random number sequence which was used to
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28 allocate subjects to the treatment or wait-list control group. The randomization schedule and
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30 sealed envelopes were prepared by an individual who worked closely with the Centre for
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32 Statistical Design and Analysis and was not directly involved in the study. Upon review of the
33
34 screening/baseline ABPM results, consenting subjects who met study inclusion criteria were
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36 randomized. Those randomized to the treatment arm began the MBSR program within 4 weeks
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38 of their baseline visit and had ABPM repeated 12 weeks after starting MBSR. Those randomized
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40 to the wait-list control arm were wait-listed for 12 weeks and subsequently began MBSR within
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42 4 weeks of their 12 week post baseline ABPM (Figure 1).
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48 **Primary Outcome**

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50 The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour ambulatory blood pressure
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52 (ABP). The primary objective of the HARMONY study is to compare mean awake and 24 hour
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3 ABP between the treatment and control arms at the 12 week post-baseline primary assessment
4 period (Figure 1)
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7 8 **Secondary Outcomes** 9

10 Secondary outcomes include evaluating a within-group effect of MBSR on ABP from
11 pre- to post- MBSR intervention. Persistence of effect 12 weeks after completing the therapy will
12 also be investigated (Figure 1). Between and within-group comparisons of the effect of MBSR
13 on nighttime ABP will also be assessed. The proportion of subjects achieving blood pressure
14 targets (24 hour ABP < 130/80, daytime ABP < 135/85 mmHg), those requiring the initiation of
15 medical therapy during the study and adverse events will also be examined. The amount of
16 MBSR practiced outside the classroom will be analyzed (via participant diaries and homework
17 logs) with respect to change in blood pressure to evaluate any dose-response interactions.
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20 Associations between the effect of MBSR on ABP and individual participant characteristics will
21 also be explored. This will be achieved by examining covariates and incorporating them into a
22 model with blood pressure. See Table 2 for further details regarding data collected at study visits.
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25 **Table 2.** Baseline and ongoing data collection. All listed measurements were collected baseline.
26 Measurements 1-5 are repeated at subsequent study visits (before MBSR, following MBSR and
27 at the 12-week study close-out).
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1. Ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM):
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Participants wear an ambulatory blood pressure monitor (model 90207, Spacelabs Medical Inc., Redmond, WA).▪ Blood pressure recorded every 15 minutes during a typical day and every 30 minutes between 11 pm and 7 am.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mean values calculated for systolic and diastolic blood pressure
2. Anthropometric measurements:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Body weight and height measured to calculate Body Mass Index. ▪ Waist circumference measured at the top of the iliac crest.
3. Office blood pressure:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seated office systolic and diastolic blood pressure measured by BpTRU (VSM MedTech Ltd., Vancouver, BC, Canada). ▪ Device takes 6 measurements every 2 minutes. Averages the last 5 to determine the average seated blood pressure.
4. Fasting serum samples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plasma glucose, HbA1c, total cholesterol, HDL- cholesterol, LDL-cholesterol, triglycerides, creatinine, electrolytes and liver enzyme levels.
5. Urine samples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urine creatinine levels and microalbuminuria levels.
6. Electrocardiogram (ECG)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ECG to detect any abnormal heart rhythms and left ventricular hypertrophy.

The following questionnaires were included in the study protocol to account for external confounders: 1) Demographics and Lifestyle Questionnaire, 2) State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2[64], 3) Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale[65], 4) Perceived Stress Scale[66], 5) Psychosocial Stress Questionnaire[67], 6) Exercise questionnaire, 7) Job Content Questionnaire[68], 8) Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire[69], 9) Clinical Outcome Routine

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3 Evaluation Outcome Measure[70], 10) Toronto Mindfulness Scale[71]. All questionnaires
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5 administered at baseline with questionnaires 2, 4, 5, and 6 repeated at each study visit (ie. Pre
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7 MBSR, post MBSR, and study close out). The Toronto Mindfulness Scale was administered after
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9 the 2nd and 7th MBSR class. Planned future analyses include evaluating the relationships between
10
11 blood pressure, gender and responses from the questionnaires.
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14 15 **Intervention**

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17 Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a multi-component group therapy that
18
19 provides systematic training in mindfulness meditation as a self-regulation approach to stress
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21 reduction and emotion management. The primary goal of MBSR is to provide participants with
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23 training meditation techniques that will cultivate psychological resilience and resistance to stress
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25 through cognitive restructuring. This is achieved through fostering the quality of
26
27 “mindfulness”[29-31,34,42,51,72,72,73]. MBSR teaches attendees to approach stressful
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29 situations “mindfully”; allowing them to step back from thoughts and feelings during stressful
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31 situations and avoid engaging in anxious worry that may otherwise escalate into a cycle of stress
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33 reactivity and contribute to more emotional distress[74-77].
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39 The standard MBSR program is delivered by trained therapists to groups of 25 - 30
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41 individuals and consists of 10 sessions: an introductory session, eight weekly sessions of 2.5 hours,
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43 and a 6 hour intensive session/silent retreat held between week six and seven of the course on a
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45 Saturday or Sunday. The MBSR program incorporates four major therapeutic elements: formal
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47 meditation, informal mindfulness practice, psycho-educational activities, and self monitoring /
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49 reflection exercises. Each session also includes guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation,
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51 breathing exercises and yoga, as well as didactic teaching and discussion. The development of
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53 mindfulness depends heavily upon regular and repeated practice; thus participants commit to
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3 carry out daily 15-45 minute homework assignments. Daily meditation practice is encouraged;
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5 homework includes both formal and informal meditation practices, as well as self-observation
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7 questions. CDs are included to guide attendees in daily formal meditation practice.
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10 Adherence to MBSR was tracked by participant diary and homework log. Together, these
11
12 capture the amount of time participants spent on various learned meditation practices each week.
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14 As the MBSR program is standardized and can be offered to both heterogeneous and
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16 homogeneous groups, subjects were accommodated in other MBSR classes if necessary for
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18 scheduling.
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22 **Data Collection**

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24 All study related information is maintained in individual subjects charts as well as
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26 electronically in a Microsoft Access Database file.
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29 **Safety**

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31 Lifestyle therapy is indicated for people who have stage 1 hypertension (140-159/90-99
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33 mmHg) with no underlying risk factors[1]. Linden has previously demonstrated the role and
34
35 safety of the wait-list control methodology and determined it to be appropriate in studies with
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37 stage 1 and 2 hypertensives (140-179/90-109 mmHg)[23,62]. In accordance with the Canadian
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39 standard of care for blood pressure management, all participants received standard
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41 recommendations of suggested lifestyle modifications for blood pressure management at study
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43 entry.
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48 With participant consent, primary care physician(s) are informed of their patient's
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50 participation in the study. Physicians are asked to delay the start of their patient's
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52 antihypertensive therapy until after they have completed the study. If physicians believe that
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54 antihypertensive should be initiated, they are asked to communicate their decision to study staff
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3 before doing so. A letter updating their patient's progress, along with laboratory and ABPM
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5 results are sent to the primary care physician after each study visit.
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8 Automated office blood pressure safety assessments are included to closely monitor
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10 subjects' blood pressure and the primary investigator is notified if subjects exceed blood pressure
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12 safety limits. If any of the following conditions are discovered during study enrollment
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14 participants are withdrawn and treated: 1) increases in ambulatory blood pressure of 20/10
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16 mmHg or greater, 2) accelerated hypertension with an office reading of 160/100 mmHg or
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18 greater, 3) macrovascular target organ damage, 4) diabetes mellitus or 5) chronic kidney disease
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20 (GFR<60 ml/min). Any subject started on antihypertensive therapy during the study remains in
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22 the study and the initiation of medical therapy is recorded.
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26 27 **Sample Size Considerations**

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29 The main objective of this study is to assess the difference in mean awake and 24 hour
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31 systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure 12 weeks post baseline between the treatment
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33 and wait-list control arm. The following calculations/analyses are based on Linden's work and
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35 the difference in mean systolic blood pressure between treatment groups measured as by ABPM.
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37 Linden found a 6.1 mmHg systolic blood pressure drop from baseline to the end of the primary
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39 assessment period for participants in the immediate intervention group, whereas the wait-list
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41 control group showed a 0.9 mmHg increase in the same time interval[23] This resulted in a 7.0
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43 mmHg difference between the two groups[23], a relatively large treatment effect, due in part to
44
45 the use of subjects with higher blood pressure.
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50 Unlike Linden who found blood pressure rising in the control group, more recent results
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52 from the Double Exposure study in a hypertensive cohort found that blood pressure tends to fall
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54 over time, even in unmedicated hypertensives, possibly due to adoption of lifestyle
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3 changes[78,79]. Baseline data from the unmedicated hypertensive cohort in the Double Exposure
4 study demonstrated mean awake ABP equal to 137/85 ± 8/5 mmHg. After one year, mean awake
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changes[78,79]. Baseline data from the unmedicated hypertensive cohort in the Double Exposure study demonstrated mean awake ABP equal to 137/85 ± 8/5 mmHg. After one year, mean awake ABP had fallen to 133/83 ± 8/7 mmHg. Based on these results, it is reasonable to assume that blood pressure will fall in the HARMONY wait-list control arm.

Very conservative assumptions were made for the HARMONY power analysis. A reduction of 2.0 mmHg for mean systolic ambulatory blood pressure (half the change observed in the Double Exposure study) was assumed for the control group (compared to the rise that Linden found[23]). The variance recorded in Linden's study (9 mmHg) was used for the HARMONY power analysis; a variance higher than that recorded in the Double Exposure cohort (8 mmHg in only 35 subjects). Linden found a blood pressure difference of 7.0 mmHg between the treatment and control group. In the power analysis, the difference between treatment and control groups was reduced from Linden's result to a more conservative value, 6mmHg. This value was chosen as it was closer to findings from Dickinson's meta-analysis[12]and because participants' overall blood pressure is anticipated to be lower in the HARMONY study (stage 1 hypertensives) compared to Linden's study (stage 1 and stage 2 hypertensives)[23]. Using a two-tailed two-sample t-test, an estimated group standard deviation of 9.0 mmHg and a significance level of 0.05 it was determined that a sample size of 37 subjects in each group would provide sufficient power (81%) to detect a systolic blood pressure difference of 6.0 mmHg between the null hypothesis (both groups start with equal means and have an equal a drop in systolic blood pressure of 8.0 mmHg) and the alternative hypothesis (control group systolic blood pressure will fall by only 2.0 mmHg). To account for potential drop-outs and subjects lost to analysis (25% lost in Linden's study[23]), the number of subjects was increased to 50 subjects per group (Figure 2).

Statistical Analysis

The primary outcome will be examined using an intent-to-treat analysis. An intent-to-treat population is defined as all subjects entered into the study that completed at least one session of MBSR. The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure. Ambulatory blood pressure between treatment and control will be compared by two-tailed two-sample t-test at the end of the 12 week primary outcome period. Within subject analysis of the effect of MBSR on ambulatory blood pressure will be performed by a paired t-test. Persistence of effect of MBSR on blood pressure will be assessed using repeated ANOVA measures, comparing group differences between subsequent study visits (baseline, pre MBSR, post MBSR, and study close out). The proportion of subjects achieving blood pressure targets will be analyzed using chi-squared tests. Multiple regression analyses will be employed to assess differences in blood pressure between subjects while adjusting for covariates. Subjects may be started on antihypertensive therapy during the study. If this leads to imbalance between the study arms, a per-protocol analysis may be performed to take this variable into account. All analyses will be carried out using SAS version 9.1 (SAS Institute, Cary North Carolina, USA).

Ethical Considerations

This research project was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Sunnybrook Research Institute (Toronto, Canada) and the University Health Network Research Ethics Board (Toronto, Canada). Planned data analyses are in full conformance with the principles of the “*Declaration of Helsinki*”[80]. Conduct of the HARMONY study is fully adherent to the principles outlined in the “*Guideline for Good Clinical Practice*” ICH Tripartite Guideline

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3 [January 1997][81] and in the 2nd edition of Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for
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5 Research Involving Humans[82].
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8 **Dissemination Plans**

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10 Data collection will be completed by early spring 2012. Primary and secondary analysis
11
12 will commence immediately after data monitoring is completed; publications will be prepared for
13
14 submission in summer of 2012. Study findings are also planned to be presented at the following
15
16 conferences: October 2012: Hypertension Canada, May 2013: American Society of
17
18 Hypertension, June 2013: European Society of Hypertension, September 2013: International
19
20 Society of Hypertension.
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23

24 **Authors' Contributions**

25
26 ST conceptualized the study and MD, BB, MM, SA, BA, NP and JI assisted with the
27
28 study design. KB, MH and MD collected data which was overseen by NP. KB and MH cleaned
29
30 the collected data, performed interim analyses and interpreted interim results. ST is the
31
32 guarantor. KB, MD, MH, and ST wrote and revised the article, as well as designed figures. NP,
33
34 BB, MM, SA, BA and JI critically revised the draft for important intellectual content. All authors
35
36 approved this final version to be published.
37
38
39

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45
46 analysis and interpretation of data, writing of the article or the decision to submit it for
47
48 publication.
49
50
51

52 **Competing Interests Statement**

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2
3 All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at
4
5 www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf (available on request from the corresponding author) and
6
7 declare: no support from any organization for the submitted work; no financial relationships with
8
9 any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years;
10
11 no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.
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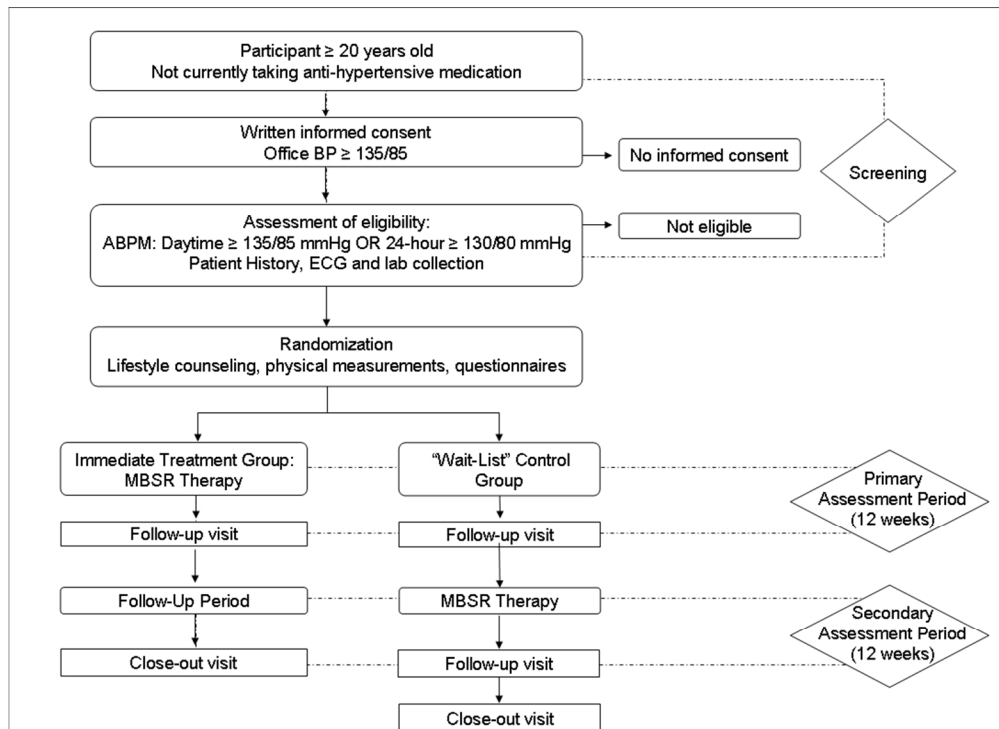
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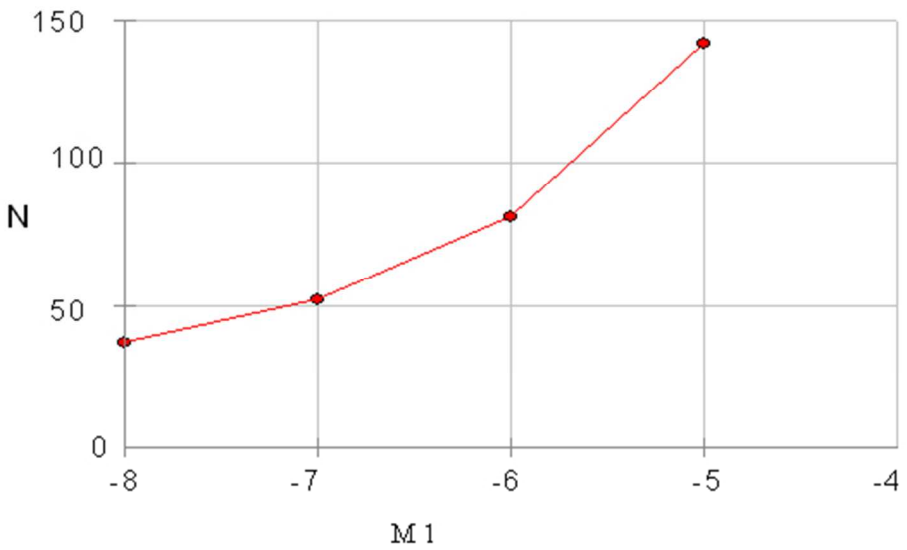


HARMONY study design.

view only

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N1 vs M1 with M2=-2.00 S1=9.00 S2=9.00 Alpha=0.05
Power=0.80 N2=N1 2-Sided T test



Power analysis graph illustrating necessary sample size.

review only



**Hypertension Analysis of stress Reduction using
Mindfulness meditatiON and Yoga (The HARMONY Study):
study protocol of a randomized control trial.**

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Keywords:	Hypertension < CARDIOLOGY, COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE, Clinical trials < THERAPEUTICS

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Manuscripts

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8 **Hypertension Analysis of stress Reduction using Mindfulness meditation and Yoga (The**
9 **HARMONY Study): study protocol of a randomized control trial.**
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10 complementary medicine, meditation.
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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Hypertension (HTN) is a leading risk factor for preventable cardiovascular disease with over 1 in 5 adults affected worldwide. Lifestyle modification is a key strategy for the prevention and treatment of HTN. Stress has been associated with greater cardiovascular risk and stress management is a recommended intervention for hypertensives. Stress reduction through relaxation therapies have been shown to have an effect on human physiology including lowering blood pressure (BP). However, individualized behavioural interventions are resource intensive and group stress management approaches have not been validated for reducing HTN. The HARMONY study is a pilot randomized controlled trial designed to determine if mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR), a standardized group therapy, is an effective intervention for lowering BP in stage-1 unmedicated hypertensives.

Methods and Analysis

Men and women unmedicated for HTN with mean daytime ambulatory blood pressure (ABP) \geq 135/85 mmHg or 24 hour ABP \geq 130/80 mmHg were included in the study. Subjects were randomized to receive MBSR immediately or after a wait-list control period. The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour ABP. The primary objective of the HARMONY study is to compare ABP between the treatment and wait-list control arm at the 12 week primary assessment period. Results from this study will determine if MBSR is an effective intervention for lowering BP in early unmedicated hypertensives.

Ethics and Dissemination

This research project was approved by the Sunnybrook Research Ethics Board and the University Health Network Research Ethics Board (Toronto, Canada). Planned analyses are in

1
2
3 full compliance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Data collection will be
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5 completed by early spring 2012. Primary and secondary analysis will commence immediately
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7 after data monitoring is completed; dissemination plans include preparing publications for
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9 submission during the summer of 2012.
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12 **Registration Details**

13 This study is registered with clinicaltrials.gov (NCT00825526).
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INTRODUCTION

Based on an annual consensus conference reviewing the world literature including the Cochrane Collaboration databases, the Canadian Hypertension Education Program recommends lifestyle modification as a key strategy for the prevention and treatment of hypertension[1]. Over 5 million Canadians, part of a worldwide epidemic, are hypertensive[2]. Data extrapolated from large population surveys and prospective studies[3,4] show that approximately 250,000 Canadians with high-normal blood pressure (SBP 120-139 or DBP 80-89 mmHg) will develop full-blown high blood pressure every year (BP \geq 140/90 mmHg) – putting them at higher risk for heart attack and stroke, necessitating the use of medications in most of them. Preventing and controlling hypertension is one of the most cost effective strategies for reducing the global burden of premature cardiovascular disease and death[5]. Reducing systolic blood pressure by just 3 mmHg in the general population has the potential to reduce stroke mortality by 8% and coronary artery disease mortality by 5%[6,7]. The published findings of the *InterStroke* study, one of the largest studies of its type in the world, concluded definitively that uncontrolled hypertension is the single most influential risk factor for stroke[8].

Stress has been associated with greater cardiovascular risk and consideration of stress management is a recommended intervention for hypertensives[1]. However, specific stress management approaches are not well validated for reducing hypertension[9-11]. Stress management therapies can be differentiated based on their approach and delivery: single- or multi-component approach and individualized or group delivery. Certain therapeutic approaches have been efficacious for reducing blood pressure in hypertensive subjects: transcendental meditation (a single-component, individualized therapy), cognitive behavioral therapy (a multi-

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3 component, individualized therapy) and, more recently, contemplative meditation[12] (a multi-
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5 component, group therapy).
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8 Transcendental meditation (TM) is a standardized form of meditation where an individual
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10 repeats a mantra to move the mind towards a higher state of concentration; this in turn leads to a
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12 greater sense of relaxation and physiological calming[9]. Evidence indicates that single-
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14 component interventions like TM are efficacious in some conditions[13-18,18,18] including
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16 hypertension[19], with possible long term effects[16]. The blood pressure lowering effect of TM
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18 has been further supported by two meta-analyses, each suggesting TM can reduce both systolic
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20 and diastolic blood pressure[20,21]. However, other meta-analyses have suggested that the
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22 available clinical trials had significant “methodological weaknesses and [were] potentially biased
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24 by the affiliation of authors to the TM organization”[9]; thus, one must proceed with caution
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26 when evaluating if TM has a cumulative positive effect on lowering blood pressure[9]. Cognitive
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28 behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches subjects to be aware of stressors and to re-evaluate negative
29
30 life events[22]. In a carefully controlled trial, Linden et al demonstrated that CBT decreased
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32 blood pressure in unmedicated hypertensive participants[23]. While CBT, a multi-component
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34 individualized therapy, has demonstrated efficacy in treating hypertension the cost of
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36 administering this one-on-one therapy presents a significant barrier to its widespread use.
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38 Contemplative meditation has demonstrated promising results however limited research on the
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40 topic indicates that more work must be done before final conclusions can be drawn[12].
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48 Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), like CBT, is a multi-component therapy
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50 that encourages participants to modify their thought pattern through changing their relationship
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52 and approach to stressors in their lives[24]. However, unlike CBT, MBSR is a standardized
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54 group therapy which can be delivered to a heterogeneous population. It is now available for
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3 stress reduction through some community and hospital alternative medicine programs and in
4 Ontario it is covered in part by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan. While CBT can be viewed as
5 an acute treatment option, MBSR works as both an acute and preventative treatment as it
6 provides participants with strategies for working with the challenges and stressors in their
7 lives[25]. MBSR teaches participants to use mindfulness as an approach to adapt to stress, pain
8 and illness. In both clinical and non-clinical populations, MBSR and related mindfulness based
9 therapeutic practices have demonstrated benefits for: chronic pain[26-29], anxiety[30-34],
10 depression[30,33-37], fibromyalgia[38-40], binge-eating[41] and psoriasis[42], as well as
11 improved psychological wellbeing, immune function and cortisol levels of cancer subjects[43-
12 54], psychological well-being of cancer patient's partners[55] and glycemic control in diabetic
13 populations[56]. Three meta-analyses[57-59] support the efficacy of MBSR for improving both
14 physical and mental well-being in groups of subjects with mixed medical illness. By bringing
15 mindfulness to life stressors MBSR participants may more clearly see the full context of a
16 situation, have access to a broader range of emotional responses and therefore cope with stressful
17 situations more effectively[32].

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19 Preliminary information suggests that participating in an MBSR program also lowers
20 blood pressure[23,43,56] and improves certain components of cardiovascular functioning[60].
21 Barnes et al initiated one of the earliest studies investigating MBSR and blood pressure;
22 compared to control, those who participated in a two month meditation intervention based on
23 MBSR techniques demonstrated lower systolic blood pressure as measured by an automated
24 device: -4 mmHg (intervention) compared to +2 mmHg (control)[61]. A follow-up study using
25 ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM) also found significant differences in blood
26 pressure reduction for the meditation group at specific time periods (e.g. after school)[62]. In an

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3 abstract, Van Wielingen reported that breast cancer patients who participated in MBSR had
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5 lower automated home blood pressure compared to those on wait list control[63]. Examining the
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7 treatment group alone, those with higher blood pressure at baseline demonstrated a greater
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9 decrease in systolic blood pressure compared to those with lower systolic blood pressure at
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11 baseline[63]. A similar treatment effect was described by Linden in subjects also starting with
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13 higher blood pressure levels[64]. Two studies by Carlson et al demonstrated high rates of MBSR
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15 class attendance, compliance and home meditation[44,45], with the follow-up study reporting
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17 consistent drops in clinic blood pressure persisting up to one year[43]. A randomized controlled
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19 trial of an abbreviated 6 week program using MBSR principles for pain tolerance in
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21 normotensive university students found improved pain tolerance and lower diastolic blood
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23 pressure in both the treatment and control groups[65]. These early studies point towards a blood
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25 pressure lowering effect from MBSR. However, more rigorous methodology and larger sample
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27 sizes are required to demonstrate whether MBSR can truly lower blood pressure.
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34 Before a large outcome study can evaluate the use of MBSR for the treatment of
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36 hypertension, it is necessary to collect data documenting efficacy and treatment effect. The
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38 HARMONY study, a randomized controlled pilot trial investigating the use MBSR for
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40 unmedicated stage 1 hypertension, will test whether MBSR can significantly lower blood
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42 pressure in unmedicated hypertensives. If found effective, the HARMONY study will provide
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44 evidence to support a larger randomized controlled trial by evaluating the feasibility and safety
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46 of MBSR as a complementary or alternative treatment for hypertension.
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50 **METHODS**

51 **Study Design**

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3 The HARMONY study is a randomized, prospective, two-armed, wait-list controlled
4 pilot trial. The intervention is a standard 8 week MBSR program. A wait-list controlled trial
5 design was chosen in order to model our methodology after Linden[23]. The main outcome
6 measure is mean awake and 24 hour systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure. The study
7 population consists of unmedicated men and women with stage 1 hypertension. Based on the
8 power analysis the established recruitment goal was one hundred subjects. Screening baseline
9 ambulatory blood pressure monitoring determines hypertensive eligibility. Screening and follow-
10 up visits take place at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto Ontario. All MBSR therapy
11 is conducted at the University Health Network's Toronto General Hospital, Toronto Ontario.

24 **Study Participants**

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27 Eligible participants include adults aged 20 to 75 years old with mean awake systolic or
28 diastolic ambulatory blood pressure equal to or greater than 135 mmHg or 85 mmHg, or mean 24
29 hour ambulatory blood pressure equal to or greater than 130 mmHg or 80 mmHg. There must be
30 no antihypertensive use within six months of the screening/baseline ABPM visit. We recognize
31 the possibility that an individual may choose to go off antihypertensive therapy when they should
32 not, and may potentially base this decision on wanting to be in the HARMONY Study. In these
33 events, screening with the BPTru and ABPM should capture those individuals whose blood
34 pressure is too high and who should be on active antihypertensive therapy. In a situation where
35 screening blood pressure is too high, individuals are counselled one-on-one with the primary
36 investigator, Dr Sheldon Tobe, about their blood pressure, antihypertensive therapy and why
37 they could not be in the study. Using this methodology we hope to only recruit those who have
38 moderately elevated blood pressure (Stage 1) and do not require anti-hypertensive therapy at the
39 time of enrollment.

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Study participants consist of those who meet the screening criteria, are willing and able to participate in the MBSR program, can attend all necessary study visits and complete all safety blood pressure evaluations. Further details regarding inclusion and exclusion criteria can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Study inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Age 20 to 75 years. 2. Hypertensive as determined by ABPM at baseline (daytime \geq 135/85 mmHg or 24-hour ABPM \geq 130/80 mmHg). 3. Willing and able to participate in the MBSR program. 4. Willing to be followed for safety BP checks during the primary outcome period. 5. Willing to accept a possible waiting period of 12-weeks for MBSR. 6. Written informed consent. 7. Able to participate in mindfulness meditation program following screening ABPM.
Exclusion criteria:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of antihypertensive within 6 months of the screening ABPM. 2. Screening office BP > 180/100 mmHg and ABPM \geq 160/100 mmHg. 3. Diabetes. 4. Secondary hypertension. 5. Renal disease (GFR < 60 ml/min or overt nephropathy). 6. History of heart attack. 7. Stroke or TIA or

8. Re-vascularization procedure.
9. Active malignant disease (except non-melanoma skin cancer).
10. Epileptic seizure 6 months before the screening visit.
11. Congestive heart failure.
12. Severe liver disease.
13. Pregnancy or lactation period.
14. Participation in a clinical trial or receipt of investigational compound or treatment in the 3 months prior to the initial screening visit.
15. Planned elective surgery during the study period except for cataract surgery.
16. Inability or unwillingness to perform 3 ABPM over 6 months.

Study Recruitment

The original planned recruitment rate was 25 subjects every 6 months for a total of 100 subjects. Potential participants have been identified through the clinical practices and referral bases of Dr's Abramson, Myers and Tobe. Additional successful screening strategies have included public information sessions, advertisements in local news papers and hospital posters. Screening is performed using a validated automated blood pressure device, the BpTRU (VSM MedTech Ltd Coquitlam, Canada). Individuals with unmedicated office blood pressure $\geq 135/85$ mmHg are invited to the next step of screening using 24 hour ABPM.

Randomization and Study Blinding

Randomization to one of two study arms is done by sealed envelope method using the permuted block design, with blocks of 2 and 4 subjects to maintain the adequacy of randomization. A computer program generated a random number sequence which was used to

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3 allocate subjects to the treatment or wait-list control group. The randomization schedule and
4 sealed envelopes were prepared by an individual who worked closely with the Centre for
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6 Statistical Design and Analysis and was not directly involved in the study. Blinding is not
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8 possible for HARMONY study due to the wait-list control design of the study. However, those
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10 teaching the MBSR course are not informed which arm subjects are randomized to.
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14 Upon review of the screening ABPM results, consenting subjects who meet study inclusion
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16 criteria are randomized. Screening ABP is then used as the baseline ABP for those enrolled in
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18 the study. Subjects are randomized to either 'early' or 'delayed'. Those randomized to 'early'
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20 begin MBSR within 4 weeks of their screening/baseline visit and repeat ABPM 12 weeks after
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22 the baseline/screening visit (coinciding with completion of the MBSR course). Those
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24 randomized to "delayed" are wait-listed for 12 weeks, repeat ABPM after that wait list period
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26 and subsequently begin MBSR within 4 weeks of that ABPM (Figure 1).
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31 **Primary Outcome**

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33 The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour ambulatory blood pressure
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35 (ABP). The primary objective of the HARMONY study is to compare mean awake and 24 hour
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37 ABP between the treatment and control arms at the 12 week post-baseline primary assessment
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39 period (Figure 1)
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43 **Secondary Outcomes**

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45 Secondary outcomes include evaluating a within-group effect of MBSR on ABP from
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47 pre- to post- MBSR intervention. Persistence of effect 12 weeks after completing the therapy will
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49 also be investigated (Figure 1). Between and within-group comparisons of the effect of MBSR
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51 on nighttime ABP will also be assessed. The proportion of subjects achieving blood pressure
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53 targets (24 hour ABP < 130/80, daytime ABP < 135/85 mmHg), those requiring the initiation of
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3 medical therapy during the study and adverse events will also be examined. The amount of
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5 MBSR practiced outside the classroom will be analyzed (via participant diaries and homework
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7 logs) with respect to change in blood pressure to evaluate any dose-response interactions.
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10 Associations between the effect of MBSR on ABP and individual participant characteristics will
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12 also be explored. This will be achieved by examining covariates and incorporating them into a
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14 model with blood pressure. See Table 2 for further details regarding data collected at study visits.
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17 **Table 2.** Baseline and ongoing data collection. All listed measurements were collected baseline.
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19 Measurements 1-5 are repeated at subsequent study visits (before MBSR, following MBSR and
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21 at the 12-week study close-out).
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<p>25 1. Ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM):</p>
<p>26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 ■ Participants wear an ambulatory blood pressure monitor (model 90207, Spacelabs 28 Medical Inc., Redmond, WA). 29 30 31 32 ■ Blood pressure is recorded every 15 minutes during a typical day and every 30 33 minutes between 11 pm and 7 am. 34 35 36 ■ Mean values calculated for systolic and diastolic blood pressure 37 38 39
<p>40 2. Anthropometric measurements:</p>
<p>41</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 42 ■ Body weight and height measured to calculate Body Mass Index. 43 44 ■ Waist circumference measured at the top of the iliac crest. 45 46
<p>47 3. Office blood pressure:</p>
<p>48</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 49 ■ Seated office systolic and diastolic blood pressure measured by BpTRU (VSM 50 MedTech Ltd., Vancouver, BC, Canada). 51 52 53 54 ■ Device takes 6 measurements every 2 minutes. Last 5 measurements are averaged 55 56

to determine the average seated blood pressure.
4. Fasting serum samples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plasma glucose, HbA1c, total cholesterol, HDL- cholesterol, LDL-cholesterol, triglycerides, creatinine, electrolytes and liver enzyme levels.
5. Urine samples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urine creatinine levels and microalbuminuria levels.
6. Electrocardiogram (ECG)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ECG to detect any abnormal heart rhythms and left ventricular hypertrophy.

The following questionnaires were included in the study protocol to account for external confounders: 1) Demographics and Lifestyle Questionnaire, 2) State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2[66], 3) Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale[67], 4) Perceived Stress Scale[68], 5) Psychosocial Stress Questionnaire[69], 6) Exercise questionnaire, 7) Job Content Questionnaire[70], 8) Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire[71], 9) Clinical Outcome Routine Evaluation Outcome Measure[72], 10) Toronto Mindfulness Scale[73]. All questionnaires are administered at baseline with questionnaires 2, 4, 5, and 6 repeated at each study visit (ie. Pre MBSR, post MBSR, and study close out). The Toronto Mindfulness Scale is administered after a period of meditation during the 2nd and 7th MBSR class. Planned future analyses include evaluating the relationships between blood pressure, gender and responses from the questionnaires.

Intervention

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a multi-component group therapy that provides systematic training in mindfulness meditation as a self-regulation approach to stress

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3 reduction and emotion management. MBSR provides training in formal meditation approaches
4 with the primary goal of cultivating psychological resilience and resistance to stress. This is
5 achieved through fostering the quality of “mindfulness”, defined as the capacity to intentionally
6 be in the present moment without judgment[24]. MBSR teaches attendees to approach stressful
7 situations “mindfully”; allowing them to identify what is occurring in their bodies and minds and
8 to step back from thoughts and feelings during stressful situations. This affords participants the
9 opportunity to make wise choices with respect to managing stressful situations, such as choosing
10 to avoid engaging in anxious worry that may otherwise escalate into a cycle of stress reactivity
11 and contribute to more emotional distress[24,74-76].
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24 The standard MBSR program is delivered by trained therapists to groups of 25 - 30
25 individuals and consists of 10 sessions: an introductory session, eight weekly sessions of 2.5 hours,
26 and a 6 hour intensive session/silent retreat held between week six and seven of the course on a
27 Saturday or Sunday. The MBSR program incorporates four major therapeutic elements: formal
28 meditation, informal mindfulness practice (such as bringing mindfulness to daily activities),
29 psycho-educational activities, and self monitoring / reflection exercises. Each session also
30 includes group discussion. The development of mindfulness depends heavily upon regular and
31 repeated practice; thus participants commit to daily 45 minute homework meditation practice.
32 Homework includes both formal and informal meditation practices, as well as self-observation
33 questions. CDs are included to guide attendees in daily formal meditation practice.
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48 Participants learn new mindfulness practices each week, as well as strategies to
49 incorporate mindfulness perspectives and approaches into daily activities. Some examples of
50 mindfulness practices include the body scan, sitting meditation, mindful yoga, mindful walking,
51 mindful eating and loving kindness meditation. Participants are asked to complete a weekly
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3 homework log which tracks the number of minutes spent on formal meditation practice and
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5 whether informal mindfulness was practiced that day. Subjects are given new homework logs
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7 each week when they return for class. Both adherence to MBSR and class attendance is captured
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9 via the homework logs. Homework logs are faxed weekly from Toronto General Hospital to
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11 Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre where they are entered into the electronic database.
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13 HARMONY research staff are asked to contact participants if more than two classes are missed
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15 without explanation; this also affords study staff and participants an opportunity to discuss
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17 causes for poor class attendance. As the MBSR program is standardized, subjects can be
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19 accommodated in other MBSR classes throughout the course if necessary for scheduling. If too
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21 many classes are missed due to unforeseen personal circumstances (and not due to lack of
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23 commitment/interest by the study subject) then attempts are made to accommodate them to
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25 another MBSR course if possible
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31 **Data Collection**

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34 Study subject information is organized into individual subject charts and uploaded
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36 electronically into a Microsoft Access Database file. All data of enrolled participants is collected
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38 on denominated data collection forms, with the Contact Information page and homework logs
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40 being the only exceptions. Data from potential study participants/screen fail participants are kept
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42 in a screening log binder and a screen fail binder respectively. Coding of enrolled study
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44 participants is done by study ID, executed in sequential in order (first participant = study ID
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46 001). Data entry is completed by a research assistant; future plans include auditing all study
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48 charts and the study database at the end of the trial to ensure data was entered accurately.
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51 All study data is maintained in a secure location only accessible to study related personnel; this
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53 includes lab computers which are accessible only through authentication with ID and password.
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3 Study data is only shared with family physicians or the Nephrology Research group at
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5 Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center with the participant's consent. All source information
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7 collected is retained under the primary investigator (Dr Sheldon Tobe) as custodian. After all
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9 data entry/data auditing is completed, paper copies of study data will be stored at Iron Mountain
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11 and destroyed after 25 years as per Health Canada guidelines. Electronic study data will be kept
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13 in the Microsoft Access Database until data analysis is completed. Maintenance of study data
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15 and study confidentiality is done in full conformance with requirements from the Sunnybrook
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17 Research Ethics Board, the University Health Network Research Ethics Board and Health
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19 Canada. **Safety**

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22 Lifestyle therapy is indicated for people who have stage 1 hypertension (140-159/90-99
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24 mmHg) with no underlying risk factors[1]. Linden has previously demonstrated the role and
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26 safety of the wait-list control methodology and determined it to be appropriate in studies with
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28 stage 1 and 2 hypertensives (140-179/90-109 mmHg)[23,64]. In accordance with the Canadian
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30 standard of care for blood pressure management, all participants receive standard
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32 recommendations of suggested lifestyle modifications for blood pressure management at study
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34 entry.

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37 With participant consent, primary care physician(s) are informed of their patient's
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39 participation in the study. Physicians are asked to delay the start of their patient's
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41 antihypertensive therapy until after they have completed the study. If physicians believe that
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43 antihypertensive should be initiated, they are asked to communicate their decision to study staff
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45 before doing so. A letter updating their patient's progress, along with laboratory and ABPM
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47 results are sent to the primary care physician after each study visit.
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3 Automated office blood pressure safety assessments are included to closely monitor
4 subjects' blood pressure. The primary investigator is notified if subjects exceed blood pressure
5 safety limits. If any of the following conditions are discovered during study enrollment
6 participants are withdrawn and treated: 1) increases in ambulatory blood pressure of 20/10
7 mmHg or greater, 2) accelerated hypertension with an office reading of 160/100 mmHg or
8 greater, 3) macrovascular target organ damage, 4) diabetes mellitus or 5) chronic kidney disease
9 (GFR<60 ml/min). Any subject started on antihypertensive therapy during the study remains in
10 the study and the initiation of medical therapy is recorded.
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22 **Sample Size Considerations**

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24 The main objective of this study is to assess the difference in mean awake and 24 hour
25 systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure 12 weeks post baseline between the treatment
26 and wait-list control arm. The following calculations/analyses are based on Linden's work and
27 the difference in mean systolic blood pressure between treatment groups measured as by ABPM.
28 Linden found a 6.1 mmHg systolic blood pressure drop from baseline to the end of the primary
29 assessment period for participants in the immediate intervention group; the wait-list control
30 group showed a 0.9 mmHg increase in the same time interval[23] This resulted in a 7.0 mmHg
31 difference between the two groups[23], a relatively large treatment effect, due in part to the use
32 of subjects with higher blood pressure.
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46 Unlike Linden who found blood pressure rising in the control group, more recent results
47 from the Double Exposure study found that blood pressure tended to fall over time, even in
48 unmedicated hypertensives. This may have been due in part to an adoption of lifestyle
49 changes[77,78]. Baseline data from the unmedicated hypertensive cohort in the Double Exposure
50 study demonstrated mean awake ABP equal to 137/85 ± 8/5 mmHg. After one year, mean awake
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3 ABP had fallen to $133/83 \pm 8/7$ mmHg. Based on these results, it is reasonable to assume that
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5 blood pressure will fall in the HARMONY wait-list control arm.
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8 Very conservative assumptions were made for the HARMONY power analysis. A
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10 reduction of 2.0 mmHg for mean systolic ambulatory blood pressure (half the change observed
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12 in the Double Exposure study) was assumed for the control group (compared to the rise that
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14 Linden found[23]). The variance recorded in Linden's study (9 mmHg) was used for the
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16 HARMONY power analysis; variance higher than that recorded in the Double Exposure cohort
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18 (8 mmHg in only 35 subjects). Linden found a blood pressure difference of 7.0 mmHg between
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20 the treatment and control group. In our power analysis, the difference between treatment and
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22 control groups was reduced from Linden's result to a more conservative value, 6mmHg. This
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24 value was chosen for two reasons: 1) It was closer to findings from Dickinson's meta-
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26 analysis[11]and 2) Participants' overall blood pressure is anticipated to be lower in the
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28 HARMONY study (stage 1 hypertensives) compared to Linden's study (stage 1 and stage 2
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30 hypertensives)[23]. Using a two-tailed two-sample t-test, an estimated group standard deviation
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32 of 9.0 mmHg and a significance level of 0.05 it was determined that a sample size of 37 subjects
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34 in each group would provide sufficient power (81%) to detect a systolic blood pressure
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36 difference of 6.0 mmHg between the null hypothesis (both groups start with equal means and
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38 have an equal a drop in systolic blood pressure of 8.0 mmHg) and the alternative hypothesis
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40 (control group systolic blood pressure will fall by only 2.0 mmHg). To account for potential
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42 drop-outs and subjects lost to analysis (25% lost in Linden's study[23]), the number of subjects
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44 was increased to 50 subjects per group (Figure 2).
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52 **Statistical Analysis**

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3 The primary outcome will be examined using an intent-to-treat analysis. An intent-to-
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The primary outcome will be examined using an intent-to-treat analysis. An intent-to-treat population is defined as all subjects in the study who completed at least one session of MBSR. The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure. Ambulatory blood pressure between treatment and control will be compared by two-tailed two-sample t-test at the end of the 12 week primary outcome period. Within subject analysis of the effect of MBSR on ambulatory blood pressure will be performed by a paired t-test. Persistence of effect of MBSR on blood pressure will be assessed using repeated ANOVA measures, comparing group differences between subsequent study visits (baseline, pre MBSR, post MBSR, and study close out). The proportion of subjects achieving blood pressure targets will be analyzed using chi-squared tests. Multiple regression analyses will be employed to assess differences in blood pressure between subjects while adjusting for covariates. Subjects may be started on antihypertensive therapy during the study. If this leads to imbalance between the study arms, a per-protocol analysis may be performed to take this variable into account. All analyses will be carried out using SAS version 9.1 (SAS Institute, Cary North Carolina, USA).

Ethical Considerations

This research project is approved by the Research Ethics Board at Sunnybrook Research Institute (Toronto, Canada) and the University Health Network Research Ethics Board (Toronto, Canada). Planned data analyses are in full conformance with the principles of the “*Declaration of Helsinki*”[79]. Conduct of the HARMONY study is fully adherent to the principles outlined in the “*Guideline for Good Clinical Practice*” ICH Tripartite Guideline [January 1997][80] and in the 2nd edition of Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans[81].

Dissemination Plans

Data collection will be completed by early spring 2012. Primary and secondary analysis will commence immediately after data monitoring is completed; publications will be prepared for submission in summer 2012. Study findings are also planned to be presented at the following conferences: October 2012: Hypertension Canada, May 2013: American Society of Hypertension, June 2013: European Society of Hypertension, September 2013: International Society of Hypertension.

Authors' Contributions

ST and BB conceptualized the study and MD, MM, SA, BA, NP and JI assisted with the study design. KB, MH and MD collected data which was overseen by NP. KB and MH cleaned the collected data, performed interim analyses and interpreted interim results. ST is the guarantor. KB, MD, MH, and ST wrote and revised the article, as well as designed figures. NP, BB, MM, SA, BA and JI critically revised the draft for important intellectual content. All authors approved this final version to be published.

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Competing Interests Statement

All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf (available on request from the corresponding author) and declare: no support from any organization for the submitted work; no financial relationships with

any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years;
no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

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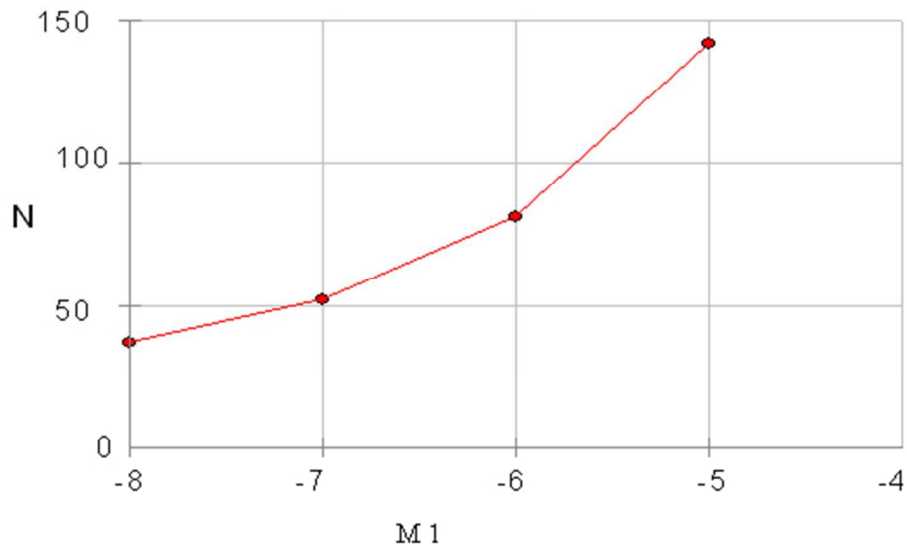
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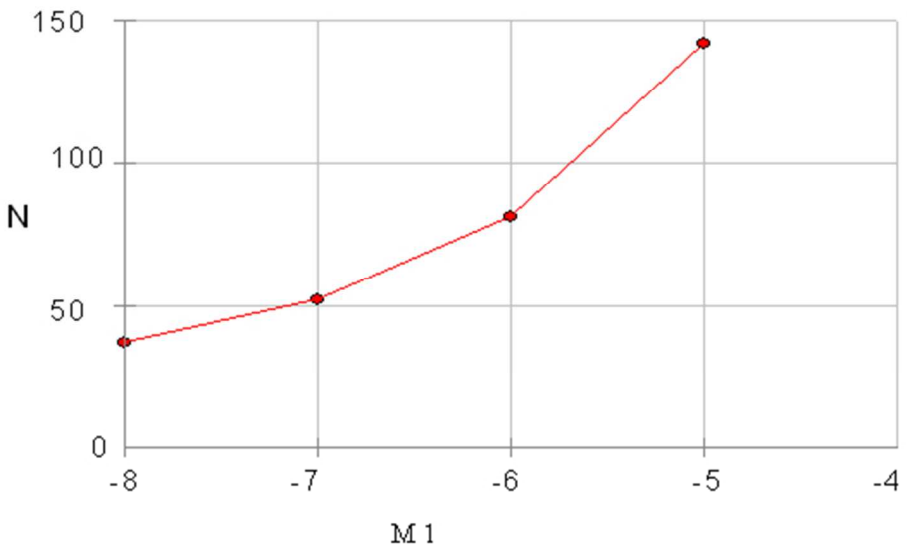
N1 vs M1 with M2=-2.00 S1=9.00 S2=9.00 Alpha=0.05
Power=0.80 N2=N1 2-Sided T test



Power analysis graph illustrating necessary sample size.

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N1 vs M1 with M2=-2.00 S1=9.00 S2=9.00 Alpha=0.05
Power=0.80 N2=N1 2-Sided T test



Power analysis graph illustrating necessary sample size.

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14 **Hypertension Analysis of stress Reduction using Mindfulness meditation and Yoga (The**
15 **HARMONY Study): study protocol of a randomized control trial.** [\[ClinicalTrials.gov](#)

16 **Identifier: NCT00825526]**
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Key words: hypertension, blood pressure, ambulatory blood pressure monitoring, complementary medicine, meditation.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

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Hypertension (HTN) is a leading risk factor for preventable cardiovascular disease with over 1 in 5 adults affected worldwide. Lifestyle modification is a key strategy for the prevention and treatment of HTN. Stress has been associated with greater cardiovascular risk and stress management is a recommended intervention for hypertensives. Stress reduction through relaxation therapies have been shown to have an effect on human physiology including lowering blood pressure (BP). However, individualized behavioural interventions are resource intensive and group stress management approaches have not been validated for reducing HTN. The HARMONY study is a pilot randomized controlled trial designed to determine if mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR), a standardized group therapy, is an effective intervention for lowering BP in stage-1 unmedicated hypertensives.

Methods and Analysis

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Men and women unmedicated for HTN with mean daytime ambulatory blood pressure (ABP) $\geq 135/85$ mmHg or 24 hour ABP $\geq 130/80$ mmHg were included in the study. Subjects were randomized to receive MBSR immediately or after a wait-list control period. The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour ABP. The primary objective of the HARMONY study is to compare ABP between the treatment and wait-list control arm at the 12 week primary assessment period. Results from this study will determine if MBSR is an effective intervention for lowering BP in early unmedicated hypertensives.

Ethics and Dissemination

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This research project was approved by the Sunnybrook Research Ethics Board and the University Health Network Research Ethics Board (Toronto, Canada). Planned analyses are in

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9 full compliance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Data collection will be
10 completed by early spring 2012. Primary and secondary analysis will commence immediately
11 after data monitoring is completed; dissemination plans include preparing publications for
12 submission during the summer of 2012.
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16 **Registration Details**

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18 This study is registered with clinicaltrials.gov (NCT00825526).
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INTRODUCTION

Based on an annual consensus conference reviewing the world literature including the Cochrane Collaboration databases, the Canadian Hypertension Education Program recommends lifestyle modification as a key strategy for the prevention and treatment of hypertension[1]. Over 5 million Canadians, part of a worldwide epidemic, are hypertensive[2]. Data extrapolated from large population surveys and prospective studies[3,4] show that approximately 250,000 Canadians with high-normal blood pressure (SBP 120-139 or DBP 80-89 mmHg) will develop full-blown high blood pressure every year (BP \geq 140/90 mmHg) – putting them at higher risk for heart attack and stroke, necessitating the use of medications in most of them. Preventing and controlling hypertension is one of the most cost effective strategies for reducing the global burden of premature cardiovascular disease and death[5]. Reducing systolic blood pressure by just 3 mmHg in the general population has the potential to reduce stroke mortality by 8% and coronary artery disease mortality by 5%[6,7]. The published findings of the *InterStroke* study, one of the largest studies of its type in the world, concluded definitively that uncontrolled hypertension is the single most influential risk factor for stroke[8].

Stress has been associated with greater cardiovascular risk and consideration of stress management is a recommended intervention for hypertensives[1]. However, specific stress management approaches are not well validated for reducing hypertension[9-11]. Stress management therapies can be differentiated based on their approach and delivery: single- or multi-component approach and individualized or group delivery. Certain therapeutic approaches have been efficacious for reducing blood pressure in hypertensive subjects: transcendental meditation (a single-component, individualized therapy), cognitive behavioral therapy (a multi-

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component, individualized therapy) and, more recently, contemplative meditation[12] (a multi-component, group therapy).

Transcendental meditation (TM) is a standardized form of meditation where an individual repeats a mantra to move the mind towards a state of greater-higher state of concentration; this in turn leads to a greater sense of relaxation and blissphysiological calming[9]. Evidence indicates that single-component interventions like TM are efficacious in some conditions[13-18,18,18] including hypertension[19], with possible long term effects[16]. The blood pressure lowering effect of TM has been further supported by two meta-analyses, each suggesting TM can reduce both systolic and diastolic blood pressure[20,21]. However, other meta-analyses have suggested that the available clinical trials had significant “methodological weaknesses and [were] potentially biased by the affiliation of authors to the TM organization”[9]; thus, one must proceed with caution when evaluating if TM has a cumulative positive effect on lowering blood pressure[9]. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches subjects to be aware of stressors; and to re-evaluate negative life events and to decrease sympathetic arousal[22]. In a carefully controlled trial, Linden et al demonstrated that CBT decreased blood pressure in unmedicated hypertensive participants[23]. While CBT, a multi-component individualized therapy, has demonstrated efficacy in treating hypertension the cost of administering this one-on-one therapy presents a significant barrier to its widespread use. Contemplative meditation has demonstrated promising results however the limited research on the topic indicates that more work must be done before final conclusions can be drawn[12].

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), like CBT, is a multi-component therapy that encourages participants to achieve results by changingmodify their thought patterns; more specifically how tothrough changing their relationship and approach to stressors in their

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9 | [lives](#)[24]. However, unlike CBT, MBSR is a standardized group therapy which can be delivered
10 to a heterogeneous population. It is now available for stress reduction through some community
11 and hospital alternative medicine programs and in Ontario it is covered in part by the Ontario
12 Health Insurance Plan. While CBT can be viewed as an acute treatment option, MBSR works as
13 both an acute and preventative treatment as it provides participants with ~~a new method of~~
14 ~~thinking and functioning strategies for working with the challenges and stressors in their~~
15 [lives](#)[25]. MBSR teaches participants to use mindfulness ~~meditation as an approach strategy~~ to
16 adapt to stress, pain and illness. In both clinical and non-clinical populations, ~~MBSR and related~~
17 ~~mindfulness based therapeutic practices have MBSR has~~ demonstrated benefits for: chronic
18 pain[26-29], anxiety[30-34], depression[30,33-37], fibromyalgia[38-40], binge-eating[41], ~~and~~
19 psoriasis[42], ~~as well as improved~~ psychological wellbeing, immune function and cortisol levels
20 ~~of~~ cancer subjects[43-54], psychological well-being of cancer patient's partners[55] and
21 glycemic control in diabetic populations[56]. Three meta-analyses[57-59] support the efficacy of
22 MBSR for improving both physical and mental well-being in groups of subjects with mixed
23 medical illness. ~~Through its cognitive restructuring format, MBSR improves participants'~~
24 ~~resistance to stress. By bringing mindfulness to life stressors, MBSR participants may more~~
25 ~~clearly see the full context of a situation. It changes the participant's cognitive appraisals have~~
26 ~~access to a broader range of emotional responses and therefore, reduces anxiety and enables the~~
27 ~~participant to cope with future~~ stressful situations more effectively[32].

28 Preliminary information suggests that participating in an MBSR program also lowers
29 blood pressure[23,43,56] and improves certain components of cardiovascular functioning[60].
30 Barnes et al initiated one of the earliest studies investigating MBSR and blood pressure;
31 compared to control, those who participated in a two month meditation intervention based on
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9 MBSR techniques demonstrated lower systolic blood pressure as measured by an automated
10 device: -4 mmHg (intervention) compared to +2 mmHg (control)[61]. A follow-up study using
11 ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM) also found significant differences in blood
12 pressure reduction for the meditation group at specific time periods (e.g. after school)[62]. In an
13 abstract, Van Wielingen reported that breast cancer patients who participated in MBSR had
14 lower automated home blood pressure compared to those on wait list control[63]. Examining the
15 treatment group alone, those with higher blood pressure at baseline demonstrated a greater
16 decrease in systolic blood pressure compared to those with lower systolic blood pressure at
17 baseline[63]. A similar treatment effect was described by Linden in subjects also starting with
18 higher blood pressure levels[64]. Two studies by Carlson et al demonstrated high rates of MBSR
19 class attendance, compliance and home meditation[44,45], with the follow-up study reporting
20 consistent drops in clinic blood pressure persisting up to one year[43]. A randomized controlled
21 trial of an abbreviated 6 week program using MBSR principles for pain tolerance in
22 normotensive university students found improved pain tolerance and lower diastolic blood
23 pressure in both the treatment and control groups[65]. These early studies point towards a blood
24 pressure lowering effect from MBSR. However, more rigorous methodology and larger sample
25 sizes are required to demonstrate whether MBSR can truly lower blood pressure.

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40 Before a large outcome study can evaluate the use of MBSR for the treatment of
41 hypertension, ~~can be conducted~~, it is necessary to collect data documenting efficacy and
42 treatment effect. The HARMONY study, a randomized controlled pilot trial investigating the use
43 of MBSR for unmedicated stage 1 hypertension, will test whether MBSR can significantly lower
44 blood pressure in unmedicated hypertensives. If found effective, the HARMONY study will
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provide evidence to support a larger randomized controlled trial by evaluating the feasibility and safety of MBSR as a complementary or alternative treatment for hypertension.

METHODS

Study Design

The HARMONY study is a randomized, prospective, two-armed, wait-list controlled pilot trial. The intervention is a standard 8 week MBSR program. A wait-list controlled trial design was chosen in order to model our methodology after Linden[23]. The main outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure. The study population consists of unmedicated men and women with stage 1 hypertension. Based on the power analysis the established recruitment goal was one hundred subjects. Screening baseline ambulatory blood pressure monitoring determines hypertensive eligibility. Screening and follow-up visits take place at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Toronto Ontario. All MBSR therapy ~~was~~is conducted at the University Health Network's Toronto General Hospital, Toronto Ontario.

Study Participants

Eligible participants ~~were~~include adults aged 20 to 75 years old ~~who had a~~with mean awake systolic or diastolic ambulatory blood pressure equal to or greater than 135 mmHg or 85 mmHg, or mean 24 hour ambulatory blood pressure equal to or greater than 130 mmHg or 80 mmHg. There must be no antihypertensive use within six months of the screening/baseline ABPM visit. We recognize the possibility that an individual may choose to go off antihypertensive therapy when they should not, and may potentially base this decision on wanting to be in the HARMONY Study. In these events, screening with the BPTru and ABPM should capture those individuals whose blood pressure is too high and who should be on active

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antihypertensive therapy. In a situation where screening blood pressure is too high, individuals are counselled one-on-one with the primary investigator, Dr Sheldon Tobe, about their blood pressure, antihypertensive therapy and why they could not be in the study. Using this methodology we hope to only recruit those who have moderately elevated blood pressure (Stage 1) and do not require anti-hypertensive therapy at the time of enrollment.

Study participants consist of those who meet the screening criteria, ~~were~~ are willing and able to participate in the MBSR program, ~~could~~ can attend all necessary study visits and complete all safety blood pressure evaluations. Further details regarding inclusion and exclusion criteria can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Study inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:
1. Age 20 to 75 years.
2. Hypertensive <u>as determined</u> on -by ABPM at baseline (daytime \geq 135/85 mmHg or 24-hour ABPM \geq 130/80 mmHg).
3. Willing and able to participate in the MBSR program.
4. Willing to be followed for safety BP checks during the primary outcome period.
5. Willing to accept a possible waiting period of 12-weeks for MBSR.
6. Written informed consent.
7. Able to participate in mindfulness meditation program following screening ABPM.
Exclusion criteria:

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1. Use of antihypertensive within 6 months of the screening ABPM.
2. Screening office BP > 180/100 mmHg and ABPM \geq 160/100 mmHg.
3. Diabetes.
4. Secondary hypertension.
5. Renal disease (GFR < 60 ml/min or overt nephropathy).
6. History of heart attack.
7. Stroke or TIA or
8. Re-vascularization procedure.
9. Active malignant disease (except non-melanoma skin cancer).
10. Epileptic seizure 6 months before the screening visit.
11. Congestive heart failure.
12. Severe liver disease.
13. Pregnancy or lactation period.
14. Participation in a clinical trial or receipt of investigational compound or treatment in the 3 months prior to the initial screening visit.
15. Planned elective surgery during the study period except for cataract surgery.
16. Inability or unwillingness to perform 3 ABPM over 6 months.

Study Recruitment

The original planned recruitment rate was 25 subjects every 6 months for a total of 100 subjects. Potential participants were-have been identified through the clinical practices and referral bases of Dr's Abramson, Myers and Tobe. Additional successful screening strategies included-have included public information sessions, advertisements in local news papers and

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hospital posters. Screening ~~was is~~ performed using a validated automated blood pressure device, the BpTRU (VSM MedTech Ltd Coquitlam, Canada). ~~Those Individuals~~ with unmedicated office blood pressure $\geq 135/85$ mmHg ~~were are~~ invited to the next step of screening ~~using of~~ 24 hour ABPM.

Randomization and Study Blinding

Randomization to one of two study arms ~~was is~~ done by sealed envelope method using the permuted block design, with blocks of 2 and 4 subjects to maintain the adequacy of randomization. A computer program generated a random number sequence which was used to allocate subjects to the treatment or wait-list control group. The randomization schedule and sealed envelopes were prepared by an individual who worked closely with the Centre for

Statistical Design and Analysis and was not directly involved in the study. ~~Blinding is not possible for HARMONY study due to the wait-list control design of the study. However, those teaching the MBSR course are not informed which arm subjects are randomized to.~~

Upon review of the screening ~~baseline~~ ABPM results, consenting subjects who meet study inclusion criteria ~~were are~~ randomized. ~~Screening ABP is then used as the baseline ABP for those enrolled in the study. Subjects are randomized to either 'early' or 'delayed'. Those randomized to 'early' the treatment arm began begin the MBSR program within 4 weeks of their screening/baseline visit/baseline visit and had ABPM repeat/repeat ABPM 4 12 weeks after the baseline/screening visit after starting MBSR (coinciding with completion of the MBSR course).~~

Those randomized to ~~"delayed" the wait-list control arm were are~~ wait-listed for 12 weeks ~~and~~ ~~repeat ABPM after that wait list period and~~ subsequently ~~began begin~~ MBSR within 4 weeks of ~~that their 12-week post-baseline~~ ABPM (Figure 1).

Primary Outcome

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9 The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour ambulatory blood pressure
10 (ABP). The primary objective of the HARMONY study is to compare mean awake and 24 hour
11 ABP between the treatment and control arms at the 12 week post-baseline primary assessment
12 period (Figure 1)
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15 16 **Secondary Outcomes**

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18 Secondary outcomes include evaluating a within-group effect of MBSR on ABP from
19 pre- to post- MBSR intervention. Persistence of effect 12 weeks after completing the therapy will
20 also be investigated (Figure 1). Between and within-group comparisons of the effect of MBSR
21 on nighttime ABP will also be assessed. The proportion of subjects achieving blood pressure
22 targets (24 hour ABP < 130/80, daytime ABP < 135/85 mmHg), those requiring the initiation of
23 medical therapy during the study and adverse events will also be examined. The amount of
24 MBSR practiced outside the classroom will be analyzed (via participant diaries and homework
25 logs) with respect to change in blood pressure to evaluate any dose-response interactions.
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27 Associations between the effect of MBSR on ABP and individual participant characteristics will
28 also be explored. This will be achieved by examining covariates and incorporating them into a
29 model with blood pressure. See Table 2 for further details regarding data collected at study visits.
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33 **Table 2.** Baseline and ongoing data collection. All listed measurements were collected baseline.
34 Measurements 1-5 are repeated at subsequent study visits (before MBSR, following MBSR and
35 at the 12-week study close-out).
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1. Ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM):
▪ Participants wear an ambulatory blood pressure monitor (model 90207, Spacelabs Medical Inc., Redmond, WA).

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blood pressure <u>is</u> recorded every 15 minutes during a typical day and every 30 minutes between 11 pm and 7 am. ▪ Mean values calculated for systolic and diastolic blood pressure
2. Anthropometric measurements:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Body weight and height measured to calculate Body Mass Index. ▪ Waist circumference measured at the top of the iliac crest.
3. Office blood pressure:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seated office systolic and diastolic blood pressure measured by BpTRU (VSM MedTech Ltd., Vancouver, BC, Canada). ▪ Device takes 6 measurements every 2 minutes. <u>Averages the last 5 measurements are averaged</u> to determine the average seated blood pressure.
4. Fasting serum samples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plasma glucose, HbA1c, total cholesterol, HDL- cholesterol, LDL-cholesterol, triglycerides, creatinine, electrolytes and liver enzyme levels.
5. Urine samples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urine creatinine levels and microalbuminuria levels.
6. Electrocardiogram (ECG)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ECG to detect any abnormal heart rhythms and left ventricular hypertrophy.

The following questionnaires were included in the study protocol to account for external confounders: 1) Demographics and Lifestyle Questionnaire, 2) State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2[66], 3) Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale[67], 4) Perceived Stress Scale[68], 5)

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9 Psychosocial Stress Questionnaire[69], 6) Exercise questionnaire, 7) Job Content
10 Questionnaire[70], 8) Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire[71], 9) Clinical Outcome Routine
11 Evaluation Outcome Measure[72], 10) Toronto Mindfulness Scale[73]. All questionnaires are
12 administered at baseline with questionnaires 2, 4, 5, and 6 repeated at each study visit (ie. Pre
13 MBSR, post MBSR, and study close out). The Toronto Mindfulness Scale ~~was~~is administered
14 after a period of meditation during the 2nd and 7th MBSR class. Planned future analyses include
15 evaluating the relationships between blood pressure, gender and responses from the
16 questionnaires.
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24 **Intervention**

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26 Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a multi-component group therapy that
27 provides systematic training in mindfulness meditation as a self-regulation approach to stress
28 reduction and emotion management. ~~The primary goal of MBSR is to provide participants with~~
29 ~~formal training in formal meditation techniques approaches that will with the primary goal of~~
30 ~~cultivating~~ psychological resilience and resistance to stress, ~~through cognitive restructuring.~~
31 This is achieved through fostering the quality of “~~mindfulness~~” ~~which has been~~
32 ~~defined~~ mindfulness”, defined as the capacity to intentionally be in the present moment without
33 judgement-[24]. MBSR teaches attendees to approach stressful situations “mindfully”; allowing
34 them to identify what is happening occurring in their bodies and minds and to step back from
35 thoughts and feelings during stressful situations. ~~This affords participants and the opportunity to~~
36 make wise choices with respect to managing stressful situations, such as choosing to avoid about
37 how to deal with the situation such as not avoid engaging in anxious worry that may otherwise
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9 The standard MBSR program is delivered by trained therapists to groups of 25 - 30
10 individuals and consists of 10 sessions: an introductory session, eight weekly sessions of 2.5 hours,
11 and a 6 hour intensive session/silent retreat held between week six and seven of the course on a
12 Saturday or Sunday. The MBSR program incorporates four major therapeutic elements: formal
13 meditation, informal mindfulness practice (such as e.g. bringing mindfulness to daily activities),
14 psycho-educational activities, and self monitoring / reflection exercises. -Each session also
15 includes guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation, breathing exercises and yoga, as well as
16 didactic teaching and group discussion-. The development of mindfulness depends heavily upon
17 regular and repeated practice; thus participants commit to carry out daily 15-45 minute
18 homework assignments. Daily meditation practice, is encouraged. H; homework Homework
19 includes both formal and informal meditation practices, as well as self-observation questions. CDs
20 are included to guide attendees in daily formal meditation practice.

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31 Participants are taught learn new MBSR exercises mindfulness practices each week, as
32 well as strategies to incorporate MBSR mindfulness perspectives and approaches into daily
33 activities. Some examples of learned mindfulness practices included in MBSR are the body scan,
34 sitting -meditation (initially focusing on the breath and then sequentially expanding awareness to
35 include bodily sensation, sound, thoughts and feelings and ultimately bringing awareness to
36 whatever arises in the moment), mindful yoga, mindful walking meditation, mindful eating and
37 loving kindness meditation. Participants are asked to complete a weekly homework log which
38 tracks the number of minutes spent on formal meditation practice and whether they did an
39 informal mindfulness was practiced that day. ing the various learned exercises each day. Subjects
40 are given new homework logs each week when they return for class. Both a Adherence to MBSR
41 was tracked by participant diary and class attendance is captured via the homework logs.

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9 Homework logs are faxed weekly from Toronto General Hospital to Sunnybrook Health
10 Sciences Centre where they are entered into the electronic database. HARMONY research staff
11 are asked to contact participants if more than two classes are missed without explanation; this
12 also affords study staff and participants an opportunity to discuss causes for poor class
13 attendance. Together, these capture the amount of time participants spent on various learned
14 meditation practices each week. -As the MBSR program is standardized ~~and can be offered to~~
15 ~~both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups~~, subjects ~~were can be~~ accommodated in other
16 MBSR classes throughout the course if necessary for scheduling. - If too many classes are missed
17 due to unforeseen personal circumstances (and not due to lack of commitment/interest by the
18 study subject) then attempts are made to accommodate them to another MBSR course if possible

27 **Data Collection**

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29 All study-~~Study subject~~related information is ~~maintained-organized into~~ individual
30 subjects charts ~~and~~ ~~well as~~ uploaded electronically into a ~~Microsoft~~ Microsoft Access Database
31 file. All data of enrolled participants is collected on denominated data collection forms, with the
32 Contact Information page and homework logs being the only exceptions. Data from potential
33 study participants/screen fail participants are kept in a screening log binder and a screen fail
34 binder respectively. Coding of enrolled study participants is done by study ID, executed in
35 sequential in order (first participant = study ID 001). Data entry is completed by a research
36 assistant; future plans include auditing all study charts and the study database at the end of the
37 trial to ensure data was entered accurately.

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46 All study data is maintained in a secure location only accessible to study related
47 personnel; this includes lab computers which are accessible only through authentication with ID
48 and password. Study data is only shared with family physicians or the Nephrology Research
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group at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center with the participant's consent. All source information collected is retained under the primary investigator (Dr Sheldon Tobe) as custodian. After all data entry/data auditing is completed, paper copies of study data will be stored at Iron Mountain and destroyed after 25 years as per Health Canada guidelines. Electronic study data will be kept in the Microsoft Access Database until data analysis is completed. Maintenance of study data and study confidentiality is done in full conformance with requirements from the Sunnybrook Research Ethics Board, the University Health Network Research Ethics Board and Health Canada.

Safety

Lifestyle therapy is indicated for people who have stage 1 hypertension (140-159/90-99 mmHg) with no underlying risk factors[1]. Linden has previously demonstrated the role and safety of the wait-list control methodology and determined it to be appropriate in studies with stage 1 and 2 hypertensives (140-179/90-109 mmHg)[23,64]. In accordance with the Canadian standard of care for blood pressure management, all participants received standard recommendations of suggested lifestyle modifications for blood pressure management at study entry.

With participant consent, primary care physician(s) are informed of their patient's participation in the study. Physicians are asked to delay the start of their patient's antihypertensive therapy until after they have completed the study. If physicians believe that antihypertensive should be initiated, they are asked to communicate their decision to study staff before doing so. A letter updating their patient's progress, along with laboratory and ABPM results are sent to the primary care physician after each study visit.

Automated office blood pressure safety assessments are included to closely monitor subjects' blood pressure. ~~and~~ The primary investigator is notified if subjects exceed blood pressure safety limits. If any of the following conditions are discovered during study enrollment participants are withdrawn and treated: 1) increases in ambulatory blood pressure of 20/10 mmHg or greater, 2) accelerated hypertension with an office reading of 160/100 mmHg or greater, 3) macrovascular target organ damage, 4) diabetes mellitus or 5) chronic kidney disease (GFR<60 ml/min). Any subject started on antihypertensive therapy during the study remains in the study and the initiation of medical therapy is recorded.

Sample Size Considerations

The main objective of this study is to assess the difference in mean awake and 24 hour systolic and diastolic ambulatory blood pressure 12 weeks post baseline between the treatment and wait-list control arm. The following calculations/analyses are based on Linden's work and the difference in mean systolic blood pressure between treatment groups measured as by ABPM. Linden found a 6.1 mmHg systolic blood pressure drop from baseline to the end of the primary assessment period for participants in the immediate intervention group, ~~whereas~~ the wait-list control group showed a 0.9 mmHg increase in the same time interval[23] This resulted in a 7.0 mmHg difference between the two groups[23], a relatively large treatment effect, due in part to the use of subjects with higher blood pressure.

Unlike Linden who found blood pressure rising in the control group, more recent results from the Double Exposure study ~~in a hypertensive cohort~~ found that blood pressure tended to fall over time, even in unmedicated hypertensives. This may have been, possibly due in part to ante adoption of lifestyle changes[77,78]. Baseline data from the unmedicated hypertensive cohort in the Double Exposure study demonstrated mean awake ABP equal to 137/85 ± 8/5

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9 mmHg. After one year, mean awake ABP had fallen to 133/83 ± 8/7 mmHg. Based on these
10 results, it is reasonable to assume that blood pressure will fall in the HARMONY wait-list
11 control arm.
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14 Very conservative assumptions were made for the HARMONY power analysis. A
15 reduction of 2.0 mmHg for mean systolic ambulatory blood pressure (half the change observed
16 in the Double Exposure study) was assumed for the control group (compared to the rise that
17 Linden found[23]). The variance recorded in Linden's study (9 mmHg) was used for the
18 HARMONY power analysis; ~~a~~-variance higher than that recorded in the Double Exposure cohort
19 (8 mmHg in only 35 subjects). Linden found a blood pressure difference of 7.0 mmHg between
20 the treatment and control group. In ~~our~~the power analysis, the difference between treatment and
21 control groups was reduced from Linden's result to a more conservative value, 6mmHg. This
22 value was chosen for two reasons: 1) as it was closer to findings from Dickinson's meta-
23 analysis[11]and 2) because pParticipants' overall blood pressure is anticipated to be lower in the
24 HARMONY study (stage 1 hypertensives) compared to Linden's study (stage 1 and stage 2
25 hypertensives)[23]. Using a two-tailed two-sample t-test, an estimated group standard deviation
26 of 9.0 mmHg and a significance level of 0.05 it was determined that a sample size of 37 subjects
27 in each group would provide sufficient power (81%) to detect a systolic blood pressure
28 difference of 6.0 mmHg between the null hypothesis (both groups start with equal means and
29 have an equal a drop in systolic blood pressure of 8.0 mmHg) and the alternative hypothesis
30 (control group systolic blood pressure will fall by only 2.0 mmHg). To account for potential
31 drop-outs and subjects lost to analysis (25% lost in Linden's study[23]), the number of subjects
32 was increased to 50 subjects per group (Figure 2).
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50 **Statistical Analysis**

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9 The primary outcome will be examined using an intent-to-treat analysis. An intent-to-
10 treat population is defined as all subjects entered into the study that who completed at least one
11 session of MBSR. The primary outcome measure is mean awake and 24 hour systolic and
12 diastolic ambulatory blood pressure. Ambulatory blood pressure between treatment and control
13 will be compared by two-tailed two-sample t-test at the end of the 12 week primary outcome
14 period. Within subject analysis of the effect of MBSR on ambulatory blood pressure will be
15 performed by a paired t-test. Persistence of effect of MBSR on blood pressure will be assessed
16 using repeated ANOVA measures, comparing group differences between subsequent study visits
17 (baseline, pre MBSR, post MBSR, and study close out). The proportion of subjects achieving
18 blood pressure targets will be analyzed using chi-squared tests. Multiple regression analyses will
19 be employed to assess differences in blood pressure between subjects while adjusting for
20 covariates. Subjects may be started on antihypertensive therapy during the study. If this leads to
21 imbalance between the study arms, a per-protocol analysis may be performed to take this
22 variable into account. All analyses will be carried out using SAS version 9.1 (SAS Institute, Cary
23 North Carolina, USA).

24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 **Ethical Considerations**

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39 This research project was is approved by the Research Ethics Board at Sunnybrook
40 Research Institute (Toronto, Canada) and the University Health Network Research Ethics Board
41 (Toronto, Canada). Planned data analyses are in full conformance with the principles of the
42 “*Declaration of Helsinki*”[79]. Conduct of the HARMONY study is fully adherent to the
43 principles outlined in the “*Guideline for Good Clinical Practice*” ICH Tripartite Guideline
44 [January 1997][80] and in the 2nd edition of Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for
45 Research Involving Humans[81].

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Dissemination Plans

Data collection will be completed by early spring 2012. Primary and secondary analysis will commence immediately after data monitoring is completed; publications will be prepared for submission in summer of 2012. Study findings are also planned to be presented at the following conferences: October 2012: Hypertension Canada, May 2013: American Society of Hypertension, June 2013: European Society of Hypertension, September 2013: International Society of Hypertension.

Authors' Contributions

ST and BB conceptualized the study and MD, BB, MM, SA, BA, NP and JI assisted with the study design. KB, MH and MD collected data which was overseen by NP. KB and MH cleaned the collected data, performed interim analyses and interpreted interim results. ST is the guarantor. KB, MD, MH, and ST wrote and revised the article, as well as designed figures. NP, BB, MM, SA, BA and JI critically revised the draft for important intellectual content. All authors approved this final version to be published.

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Competing Interests Statement

All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf (available on request from the corresponding author) and declare: no support from any organization for the submitted work; no financial relationships with

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9 any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years;
10
11 no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.
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