The HELPER programme: HEalthy Living and Prevention of Early Relapse – three exploratory randomised controlled trials of phase-specific interventions in first-episode psychosis

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Disclaimer: this report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Background

Psychosis means:

- hearing or seeing things that are not there
- believing things that cannot be true and
- having confused thoughts.

Schizophrenia is a type of psychosis. After an attack of psychosis people can find it hard to get back to normal. People get worse after each attack.

Aims

We wanted to stop people having another attack of psychosis. We looked at three treatments. The first was a ‘mind gym’, similar to a computer game. We hoped that it would make talking therapies work better. The second helped people control their weight by healthy living. Drugs for psychosis make you gain weight and so people stop taking them. The third was a talking therapy designed to help users give up cannabis. Cannabis use causes further attacks of psychosis. We carried out a small trial for each of our treatments. We wanted to see if any were promising enough for us to carry out a much bigger study.

Methods

Our first trial (mind gym) involved 61 people waiting for talking therapy (cognitive–behavioural therapy) after their first attack of psychosis. Our second trial (weight control) involved 105 people. Our third trial (stopping cannabis) involved 110 people.

Results

People liked all three treatments. The mind-gym treatment made talking therapy work more quickly. The healthy-living treatment did not work that well although it might have helped some people who take drugs that cause a lot of weight gain. So far we do not know how well the stopping-cannabis treatment worked.

Conclusions

The mind gym is worth testing in a bigger trial.
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