

# Compassion meditation enhances empathic accuracy and related neural activity.

Posted At : December 8, 2012 6:06 PM | Posted By : [Tim Brunson, PhD](#)

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The ability to accurately infer others' mental states from facial expressions is important for optimal social functioning and is fundamentally impaired in social cognitive disorders such as autism. While pharmacologic interventions have shown promise for enhancing empathic accuracy, little is known about the effects of behavioral interventions on empathic accuracy and related brain activity. This study employed a randomized, controlled and longitudinal design to investigate the effect of a secularized analytical compassion meditation program, cognitive-based compassion training (CBCT), on empathic accuracy. Twenty-one healthy participants received functional MRI scans while completing an empathic accuracy task, the Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET), both prior to and after completion of either CBCT or a health discussion control group. Upon completion of the study interventions, participants randomized to CBCT and were significantly more likely than control subjects to have increased scores on the RMET and increased neural activity in the inferior frontal gyrus (IFG) and dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (dmPFC). Moreover, changes in dmPFC and IFG activity from baseline to the post-intervention assessment were associated with changes in empathic accuracy. These findings suggest that CBCT may hold promise as a behavioral intervention for enhancing empathic accuracy and the neurobiology supporting it.

Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci. 2012 Sep 29. Mascaró JS, Rilling JK, Tenzin Negi L, Raison CL. Department of Psychiatry, University of Arizona College of Medicine, 1501 North Campbell Avenue, PO Box 245017 Tucson, AZ 85724, USA. [craison@email.arizona.edu](mailto:craison@email.arizona.edu).

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