

Anxiety & Panic Disorders Health Center

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Acupuncture Calms Mom's Stress, Anxiety

Acupuncture Makes Moms Less Anxious, Resulting in Less Anxiety in Children

By [Jeanie Lerche Davis](#)

WebMD Health News

Oct. 15, 2003 -- A parent's [anxiety](#) leaps when their child is going into surgery. But a new study shows [acupuncture](#) needles -- carefully placed around the mother's ear -- can decrease her anxiety. When moms are less anxious, there's less anxiety in children, experts say.

Auricular or ear acupuncture has long been known to relieve stress and anxiety. Until now, however, it was not known that needles placed around the ear were so effective in relieving parental anxiety associated with a child's surgery, a constant and very real concern for doctors.

Researcher Shu-Ming Wang, MD, at the Yale University School of Medicine. Wang presented study findings at the annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists being held in San Francisco this week.

In Wang's study, 43 mothers randomly chosen to get auricular acupuncture 30 minutes before their child's surgery had significantly less anxiety than the 49 mothers who got acupuncture but at the shoulder points, wrists, and joint positions.

Also, there was significantly less anxiety in children whose mothers received auricular acupuncture to reduce anxiety when they were wheeled into the operating room, and when the anesthesia mask was put on their faces.

In fact, after the surgery was over, 51% of the auricular acupuncture-group mothers asked to keep the needles in place.

While mothers were skeptical about the acupuncture procedure, the results were indisputable, researchers say.

"After the insertion of needles into the [ear], most of them were pleasantly surprised and asked, 'Is that it?'" says Wang in a news release. The procedure involves small needles that resemble flat thumbtacks. They are unobtrusive, effective, have no side effects, and are virtually painless.

In fact, "many of the patients laughed after I showed them the needles, and only a handful of them experienced a slight stinging sensation," Wang says.

Calm Mothers Ease Anxiety in Children

A relaxed mother helps the child to relax, Wang stresses. Studies have shown that parents' anxiety can affect the child's recovery, triggering clinging, [nightmares](#), [bedwetting](#), and aggressive behavior -- all signs of extreme anxiety in children.

Actually, a parent's anxiety can be a nightmare for all involved. In rare cases, it can even be dangerous. In one case, an anxious parent actually pulled a semiconscious child away from the middle of getting anesthesia, Wang says.

Wang has personally witnessed crying parents enter operating rooms, creating anxiety in children. This "invariably causes the child to cry and affects the procedure," Wang explains. "All this anxiety distracts health-care providers' attention away from the most important person in the procedure, the child."

In another incident, a mother fainted during a procedure and injured herself.

Ancient Procedure Helps Today's Patients

How does the ancient Chinese tradition of acupuncture work? No one knows, says Wang. However, countless studies show what the Chinese have long known -- that it *does* work.

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Acupuncture is being used increasingly in anesthesiology and other medical procedures. The needles are unobstructive, painless, effective, and cause no side effects, Wang explains.

While acupuncture is not for all illnesses, "I strongly believe that if we can combine the best of acupuncture with the best of medicine, we will achieve the best care of our patients," Wang says.

Reducing anxiety in children -- and their mothers -- before surgery can go a long way toward a better recovery, Wang concludes.

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