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The effect of acupuncture on working memory and anxiety

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Background: Anxiety has been shown to impair working memory and test performance; and acupuncture has been shown to reduce anxiety.

Objective: To investigate whether acupuncture can improve memory and reduce anxiety.

Design, setting and Subjects: A two-group, randomized, single-blind study of 90 undergraduate university students.

Interventions: Subjects completed the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) form Y-1 (State Anxiety, SA) and Y-2 (Trait Anxiety, TA). Each subject then lay on a treatment table for 20 minutes. Acupuncture group had needles inserted into select acupoints; Control subjects had points touched and swabbed, but no needles were inserted. Subjects then completed the STAI form Y-1 again. Then subjects completed the Automated Operation Span Task (AOSPAN) - a computerized test of working memory.

Main outcome measures: AOSPAN and STAI scores.

Results: Acupuncture group scored 9.5% higher than Control on the AOSPAN Total Correct Score (65.39 vs. 59.90 $p=0.0134$), and committed 36% fewer math errors (2.68 vs. 4.22, $p=0.0153$). Acupuncture subjects also reported lower SA after intervention than Control (26.14 vs. 29.63, $p=0.0146$).



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