

Acupuncture calms highly anxious dental patients

March 29 2010

Acupuncture can calm highly anxious dental patients and ensure that they can be given the treatment they need, suggests a small study published in *Acupuncture in Medicine*.

A visit to the dentist provokes extreme fear and [anxiety](#) in an estimated one in 20 people, and can put them off going altogether, a condition termed odontophobia. And up to a third of patients report moderate anxiety at the prospect of dental treatment, studies show.

The authors base their findings on 16 women and four men from eight dental practice lists.

Each of the patients was moderately or extremely anxious about going to the dentist for treatment, as assessed by a validated questionnaire - the Back Anxiety Inventory (BAI).

All were in their 40s and had been trying to deal with this problem for between two and 30 years.

The BAI score was assessed before and after five minutes of acupuncture treatment, targeting two specific acupuncture points (GV20 and EX6) on the top of the head.

The acupuncture was carried out by the dentists themselves, all of whom are members of the British Dental Acupuncture Society.

The average BAI score of 26.5 fell to 11.5, and all 20 patients were able to undergo their planned treatment, whereas before this had only been possible in six - and then only partially and after a great deal of effort on the part of both dentist and patient.

The authors point out that several attempts have been made to conquer this type of anxiety, including sedatives, relaxation techniques, behavioural therapies, biofeedback and [hypnosis](#). The research indicates that these do help, but they are time consuming and require considerable levels of psychotherapeutic skills, if applied properly, say the authors.

They caution that further larger studies are needed to confirm the value of acupuncture in these sorts of cases, but suggest that [acupuncture](#) "may offer a simple and inexpensive method of treatment."

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Acupuncture calms highly anxious dental patients (2010, March 29) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-03-acupuncture-calms-highly-anxious-dental.html>

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