

Anxiety and Acupuncture

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Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Many of us suffer from a bit of anxiety now and then but it begins to affect our daily life when persistent worries and stress develop over time or after a highly taxing period or incident.

GAD is prevalent in contemporary life and is often seen to be due to a genetic predisposition or stress.

Main symptoms of GAD are worry or tension which may be constant, with little reasoning and is difficult to control. (1)

“Other symptoms include:

Difficulty concentrating

Fatigue

Irritability

Problems falling or staying asleep, and sleep that is often restless and unsatisfying

Restlessness, and often becoming startled very easily

Along with the worries and anxieties, a number of physical symptoms may also be present, including muscle tension (shakiness, headaches) and stomach problems, such as nausea or diarrhea.” (1).

Anxiety and Acupuncture

Anxiety is something frequently seen in the acupuncture clinic and even though many will not come specifically for anxiety and are not necessarily diagnosed with GAD, there is often some level of anxiety or stress playing a part in the bigger picture of individual.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) includes acupuncture and aims to treat the reason why the anxiety and stress appears in the first place. It is traditionally a preventative medicine so ideally if you are having *any* of the GAD symptoms even if not all the time, it would be good to address those anxiety tendencies before they get to the more extreme GAD stage. As TCM focuses on treating the whole being, TCM acupuncturists may encourage changes to or supplementation with herbs, diet and lifestyle in order to get optimum results.

Anxiety in general is seen as a problem with the ‘shen’ or ‘spirit’ in TCM though the reason why it surfaced can be from various imbalances or deficiencies in the body. It is the shen as well as the underlying cause of unsettled shen, that we focus on in treatments in order to restore balance.

Those who have tried acupuncture will be aware of the relaxing effect it can have and some of my clients come just to make sure they have an hour of forced relaxation regularly. Research has shown that acupuncture can release opioid peptides such as endorphins (2)(3) which helps to explain this feeling of relaxation. Acupuncture could be seen as the cheats way of getting into a meditative state without having to do the hard work to get there!



*‘Kwai Nin’ (or Quan Yin - deity symbolizing mercy/compassion) by Kim Lowe with calligraphy ‘An Na’ (feminine peace and tranquility) from...
www.ana-med.co.nz*



Anxiety and Acupuncture

Literature

The use of acupuncture for anxiety seems to have very little side effects so can serve as either an addition to, or an alternative to pharmaceutical medications (4) which can sometimes have serious adverse side effects (5). A recent study also found a reduction in medication required when acupuncture, alongside encouraged lifestyle factors such as nutrition, yogic breathing, self/partner massage, journaling, counselling and exercise were used (6).

Fertility and IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) has been found to be stressful for women and often becomes more so the more unsuccessful cycles there are (7). This area has become a strong advocate for the use of acupuncture and in part this is due it's ability to help relax the patient reducing stress and anxiety before and after embryo transfer (8) and possibly increasing chances of pregnancy (9). For the most part however, the majority of research in this area has focused on the effectiveness of acupuncture around embryo transfer with mostly positive results (10).

Studies also indicate acupuncture can be an effective treatment for anxiety from post traumatic stress (11), anxiety as a result of nicotine withdrawal (12), and auricular (ear) acupuncture seems to be effective for anxiety in peri and post-menopausal women (13) and dental anxiety (4). Acupressure (14) and acupuncture (15) have also been found to be a useful treatment for those with preoperative anxiety. Acupuncture can increase melatonin helping with sleep which often comes with anxiety (5) and a small case study of chronic non-responding (resistance to medication and 'talking therapies') patients with anxiety/depression found improvements with acupuncture. In this study four patients had been using a Community Mental Health Team service for over one or two years with daily or near daily use (16).

A recent review of acupuncture and Chinese medicine in the use of anxiety found favorable results in much of the research carried out however it is advised that more in depth and better designed research is needed as inadequate information is given in many of the methodologies of the studies reviewed (17).

“Acupuncture ...seems to have very little side effects so can serve as either an addition to, or an alternative to pharmaceutical medications”

A Clinical Study

GAD-7 is a short, validated (18)(19)(20)(21), 7 question measure for anxiety and was used in a small clinical trial by Ana-Med Acupuncture to assess 8 clients anxiety levels for four acupuncture treatments. Most clients were seeking acupuncture treatment for other conditions so the focus was not necessarily wholly on anxiety however it appeared to the practitioner to be contributing in some form to the condition being addressed.

'I just feel better in myself' is a phrase stated sometimes by clients as a result of acupuncture and it is this sense of wellness that Ana-Med attempted to monitor in designing the GA measure. A general spread of 13 clients (not necessarily with anxiety/stress problems) were asked to fill out this questionnaire on the effectiveness of acupuncture for the condition they were being treated for. The GA focused on the physical impact (PI), emotional impact (EI) and social impact (SI) their problem had on daily life. The overall well-being (VVB) and perception of their recovery (PR) were also included in this general measure. PI was whether they were physically affected/limited due to the problem, EI was whether it affected them emotionally and SI indicated whether the client was affected in their relationships and social interactions with family, friends and co-workers. PR aimed to reveal the clients optimism or pessimism in their ability to recover from the problem.

Clients came for treatment once a week, every 2 weeks, or sometimes once a month depending on what was being addressed. There were also times when some of the clients were away for longer than normal periods of time due to work, family trips or holidays. Many in this study were pre existing clients and therefore were receiving acupuncture prior to completing initial forms. Only two of the 13 general outcome clients were new at the initial form completion and one had one prior treatment. Of the 8 GAD-7 clients, two were new clients and one had one prior treatment.



Anxiety and Acupuncture

GAD-7 Results

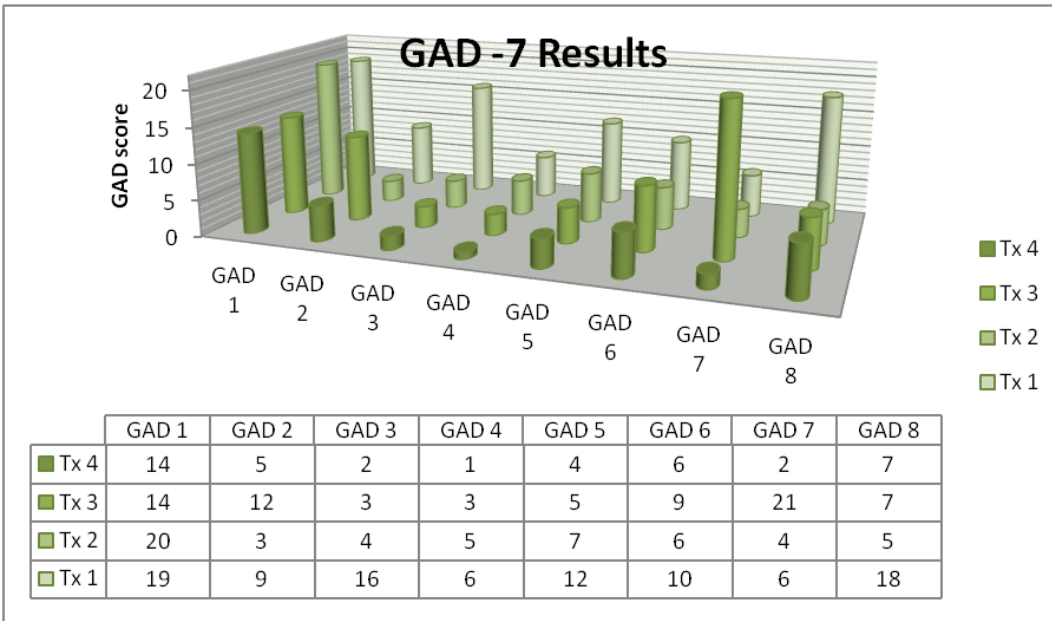


Figure 1. GAD-7 Results show total scores out of 21 for 4 acupuncture treatments of 8 clients (GAD1 = Client number 1).

Discussion

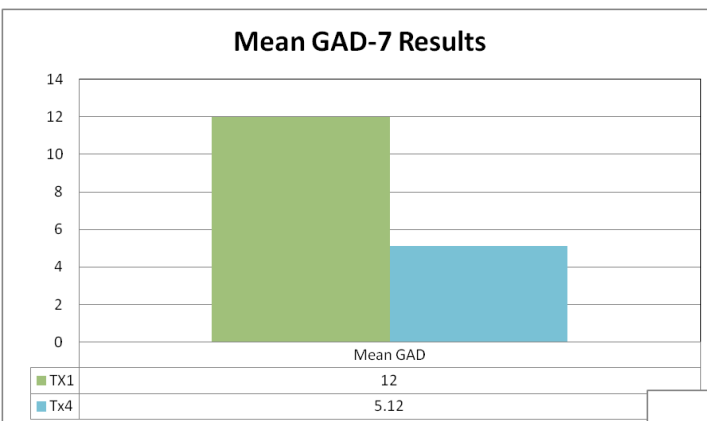


Figure 2. Tx1 = treatment 1; Tx4 = treatment 4.

Mean results for 8 GAD-7 clients show clear improvements in levels of anxiety after four acupuncture treatments (figure 2).

Mean results for all areas of the 13 clients in the GA group (physical, emotional, social, well-being and perception of recovery) also show improvements from treatment one to treatment four (figure 3 and 4).

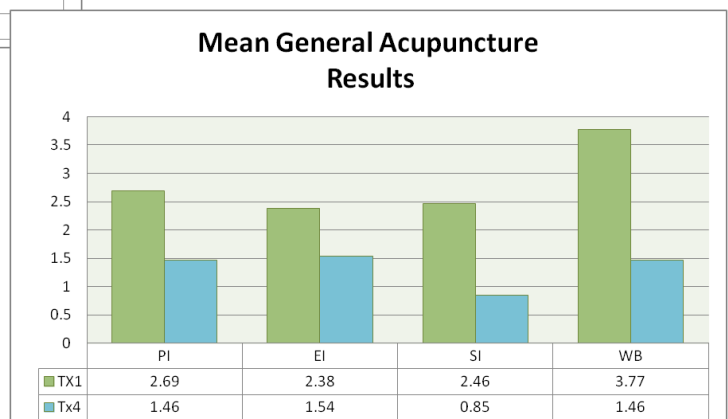


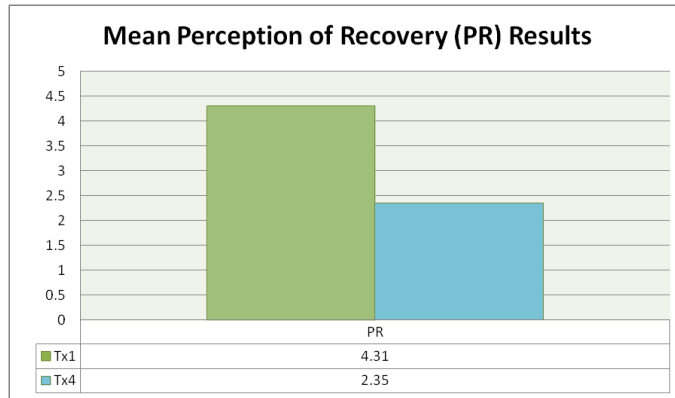
Figure 3. PI =Physical Impact; EI = Emotional Impact; SI = Social Impact; WB = Over all Well-Being; Tx1 = Treatment 1; Tx4 = Treatment4



Anxiety and Acupuncture

Discussion

Figure 4. PR= Perception of Recovery; Tx1 = Treatment 1; Tx4 = Treatment 4



This reinforces the literature that Acupuncture can be an effective therapy to treat anxiety, however acknowledgment is given to the many limitations of this study such as the size, majority of clients knew and were having acupuncture from the practitioner prior to filling out the initial form. There was also varying length of time between treatments for the each client and many of the clients were not seeking acupuncture for anxiety alone in the GAD-7

group.

Of the GAD group 3 of the 8 clients experienced lesser degrees of how difficult the anxiety made it for them in their daily life, 4 of the 8 felt the same and one felt it was more difficult (figure 5).

GA group outcomes revealed 5 of the 13 clients problem reduced in number of times they were affected since last treatment, 6 of the 13 had similar outcomes as when they started and one client was experiencing the problem more than first treatment (figure 6). The supplementary medication information displayed in figure 7 may have been ineffective as clients were asked to record doses of what they were taking however only 1 of the 13 did that for only one of her medications, another client stated she was not taking any but she was taking Chinese herbs. It would be advised that this question be simplified with perhaps tick boxes to indicate how often the supplementary medicine is being taken etc in any future studies.

On reflection for the GA some changes in questioning would have been better i.e. how often the problem had impacted at initial questioning should have had identical answers in the follow-ups as with the initial forms with the addition of monthly, yearly etc; the social impact question proved to be a bit vague for some people and should have been explained in more detail from the beginning (explanation was added half way through collecting data); scales for PI, EI, SI and WB were set out with numbers at opposite ends to the PR question which may have confused some clients.

The diversity of conditions being treated is also likely to affect results. For example client 10 and GAD 6,

“Mean results for 8 GAD-7 clients show clear improvements in levels of anxiety after four acupuncture treatments.”

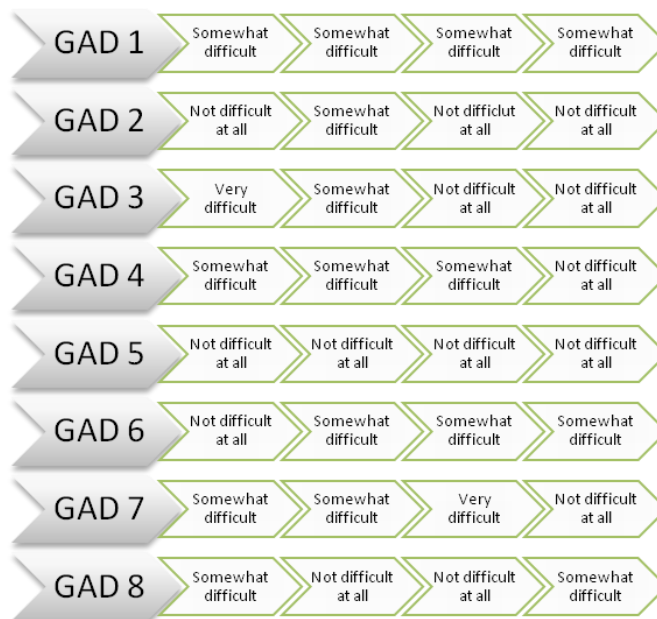


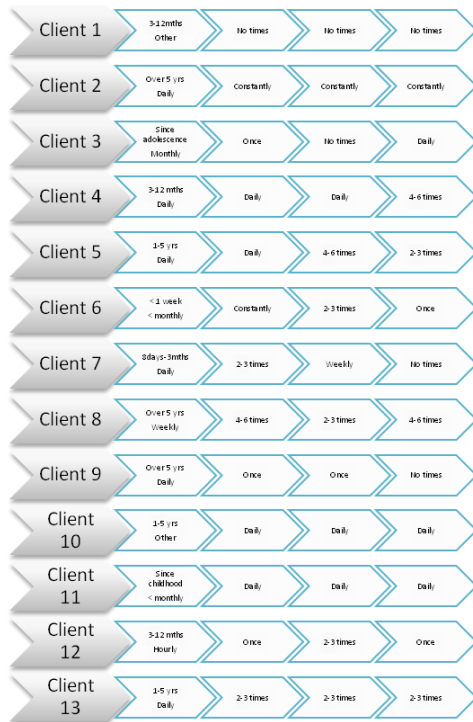
Figure 5. Client rating of how difficult the anxiety has made daily life.



Anxiety and Acupuncture

Discussion

Figure 6.
How long and often affected by problem



crease in her anxiety at this time.

I would suggest for future research that length be extended as the GAD 5 client was monitored for 5 treatments and the score continued to drop from a total score of 4 at treatment 4 to a score of 2 at treatment 5, indicating that continued improvement may be possible with acupuncture over a longer time frame. It would also be interesting to use a similar type of measure in combination with neuroscience to reveal more specific factors that may be influencing that sense of 'feeling better in self'.

Conclusion

Although much of the research in acupuncture and anxiety to date have limitations (including this study), the positive results of this research combined indicate Acupuncture is likely to be an effective treatment for anxiety. I am hopeful that future acupuncture studies in this area will begin to formulate thorough methodologies with sufficient information so as to avoid confusion about various styles of acupuncture, the sham treatment used etc which tend to compromise the integrity of the research.

Acupuncturists see first hand through clinical experience how effective Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine can be for the treatment of anxiety and I look forward to the day when we can source reliable research to back up this 3000 year old knowledge.

went through IVF, got pregnant and started getting morning sickness so many of her answers became worse in last treatment, she was the only GAD client where the difficulty of the problem got worse Client 3 and GAD 2 were being treated for endometriosis so symptoms got worse around the time of menstruation and Client 4 had a major period of stress which worsened her symptoms in her 2nd treatment. GAD 7 was burgled the night before treatment 2 which explains the dramatic in-

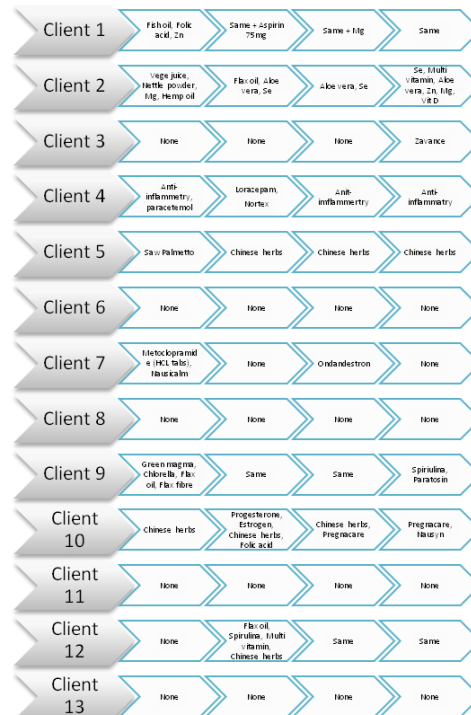


Figure 7.
Supplementary Medication



Anxiety and Acupuncture

Bibliography

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“Fertility and IVF
...has become
a strong
advocate for the
use of
acupuncture and
in part this is
due it’s ability to
help relax the
patient reducing
stress and
anxiety.”*

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Appendix: GA Results

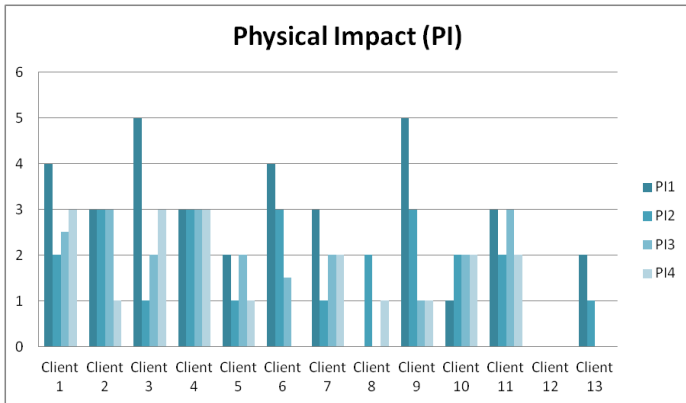


Figure 8

Figures 8-12. No bar on graph indicates a score of 0 out of 5 for Figures 8-11 and a score of 0 out of 10 for Figure 12 (PR).

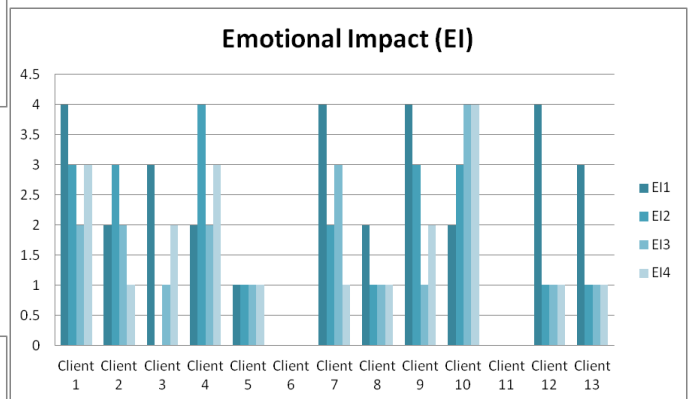


Figure 9

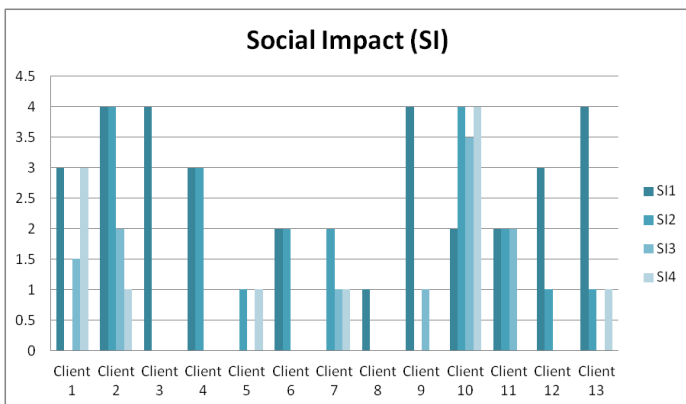


Figure 10

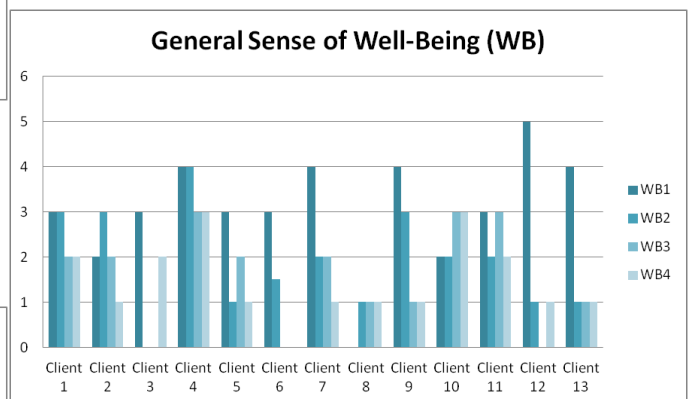


Figure 11

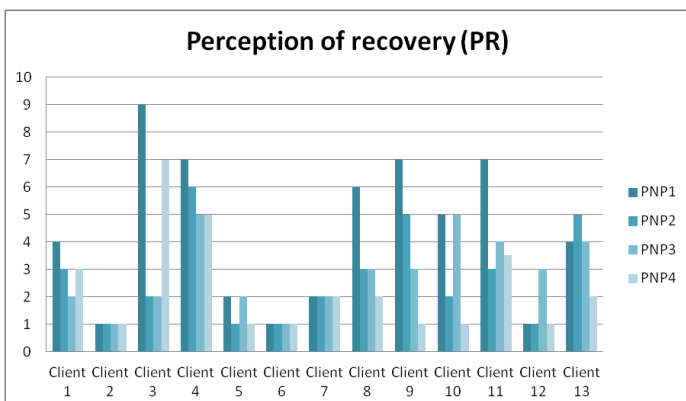


Figure 12



Anxiety and Acupuncture

Appendix: GAD-7 Forms

GAD-7: Initial form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following?

	Not at all	Several days	Over half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3

Add the score for each column together + +

Total score

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not difficult at all Somewhat difficult Very difficult Extremely difficult

Figure 13.

GAD-7: Follow-Up

Name: _____ Date: _____

Since your last acupuncture treatment, how often have you been bothered by the following?

	Not at all	Several days	Over half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3

Add the score for each column together + +

Total score

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not difficult at all Somewhat difficult Very difficult Extremely difficult

Figure 14.



Anxiety and Acupuncture

Appendix: GA Forms

General Acupuncture Measure: Initial Form

Name: _____ Age: _____
 Sex: Male Female Ethnicity: _____
 Date: _____

1. What is the main concern you are currently having acupuncture treatment for?
 If there are multiple reasons please indicate the most important thing you want resolved and use this as the 'main problem or concern' for the remaining questions.

2. Has this concern had an impact on your day to day life physically?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 2a, if No go to question 3. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers you physically in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on me physically.

3. Has this concern had an impact on your day to day life emotionally?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 3a, if No go to question 4. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers you emotionally in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on me emotionally.

4. Has this concern had an impact on your day to day life socially (relations/fps with others - family/friends/colleagues/strangers)?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 4a, if No go to question 5. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers you socially in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on me socially.

5. Has this concern had an impact on your general sense of well-being?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 5a, if No go to question 6. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers your sense of well-being in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on my sense of well-being.

6. How long have you had this problem? Please circle.
 Less than 1 Week 1 day-3 Months 3-12 Months 1-5 Year Over 5 year
 Since childhood

7. How often does this problem affect you?
 Tick the appropriate box.
 Less than monthly Weekly 2 or more times an hour
 Monthly Daily Constantly
 Fortnightly Hourly Other

8. Are you taking any medication/supplements/herbs/homeopathics etc for this problem?
 Please circle, Yes No
 a. If Yes what is it and how often do you take it?

9. Indicate on the scale how you feel you can recover from this health concern at this time.
 0 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 I think I can make a full recovery and be free from this problem with treatment & management. I think I can make an ok recovery but it may still affect me to a degree. I think this health problem is something I will always have to live with and will need continuing treatment and management for.

Figure 15.

General Acupuncture Measure: Follow Up

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. When was your last acupuncture treatment? Tick the appropriate box.
 Less than 7 days Last week 2 weeks ago 3 weeks ago 4 weeks ago
 Longer than a month ago How long if longer than a month?.....

Using the same main concern used in prior questionnaire(s) answer the remaining questions...

2. Has this concern had an impact on your day to day life physically since your last acupuncture treatment?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 2a, if No go to question 3. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers you physically in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on me physically.

3. Has this concern had an impact on your day to day life emotionally since your last acupuncture treatment?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 3a, if No go to question 3. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers you emotionally in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on me emotionally.

4. Has this concern had an impact on your day to day life socially since your last acupuncture treatment?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 4a, if No go to question 4. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers you socially in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on me socially.

5. Has this concern had an impact on your general sense of well-being since your last acupuncture treatment?
 Please circle, if Yes then answer 5a, if No go to question 5. Yes No
 a. To what extent has this concern had an impact?
 Indicate on the scale below how little or how badly it bothers your sense of well-being in daily life.
 0 1 2 3 4 5
 No bother at all. It has an extremely bad impact on my sense of well-being.

6. How often has this problem affected you since your last acupuncture treatment?
 Tick the appropriate box.
 No times 4-6 times Every 1-2 hours
 Once Daily 2 or more times an hour
 2-3 times 2 or more times a day Constantly

7. Have you taken any medication/supplements/herbs/homeopathics etc for this problem since your last acupuncture treatment?
 Please circle, Yes No
 a. If Yes what is it and how often do you take it?

8. Have you had any new symptoms arise since your last acupuncture treatment?

9. Indicate on the scale how you feel you can recover from this health concern at this time.
 0 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 I think I can make a full recovery and be free from this problem with treatment & management. I think I can make an ok recovery but it may still affect me to a degree. I think this health problem is something I will always have to live with and will need continuing treatment and management for.

Figure 13.

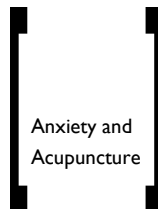
Restoring balance with physical and emotional, health and well-being during the various stages of life.

Ana-Med is based in Auckland, New Zealand. Lee-Ana Lowe is a member of The NZ Register of Acupuncturists (NZRA) and an ACC acupuncture treatment provider.



'Kwai Nin' (or Quan Yin - deity symbolizing mercy/compassion) by Kim Lowe with calligraphy 'An Na' (feminine peace and tranquility) from...
www.ana-med.co.nz

"I just feel better in myself is a phrase stated sometimes by clients as a result of acupuncture."



Summary

This article outlines the effectiveness acupuncture can have in the treatment of anxiety.

A small clinical study carried out by Ana-Med Acupuncture revealed an obvious improvement in anxiety levels of 8 clients within four acupuncture treatments.

A further study of 13 clients over four treatments, monitored acupuncture effects for conditions other than anxiety. This more general study also revealed improvements physically, emotionally, socially as well as the overall well-being of the clients at the end of the four treatments. In addition to this the 13 clients perception of how they would recover improved as well.

Although this study has obvious limits it could serve as a starting point in researching the sense that clients 'just feel better in themselves' after receiving acupuncture.