

Auricular acupressure relieves anxiety and fatigue, and reduces cortisol levels in post-caesarean section women: A single-blind, randomised controlled study

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Abstract

Background: Anxiety and fatigue adversely affect women's postpartum recovery, but few effective non-pharmacological interventions are known to relieve these two common and unpleasant symptoms.

Objectives: To examine the efficacy of an auricular acupressure intervention provided during early postpartum in reducing anxiety, fatigue levels, cortisol levels, blood pressure, and heart rate.

Design: A single-blind, randomised controlled trial.

Setting: A 40-bed postpartum unit.

Participants: Women who underwent caesarean section were randomly allocated to two groups: intervention (auricular pressure, n=40), and control (usual care, n=40).

Methods: The intervention group received auricular acupressure on the shenmen acupoint twice a day (9 AM and 5 PM), and the control group received usual postpartum care. Serum cortisol levels were assessed by immunochemiluminescence, with blood pressure and heart rate assessed by electric sphygmomanometer. Anxiety and fatigue symptoms were assessed using the State Anxiety subscale of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and the Fatigue Continuum Form, respectively.

Results: Of the 76 women who completed the study, those who received auricular acupressure had significantly lower mean cortisol levels (mean difference=4µg/dl, $p<0.05$), heart rate (mean difference=9.2 beats/min, $p<0.001$), anxiety symptoms (mean difference=3.8, $p<0.01$), and fatigue symptoms (mean difference=7.1, $p<0.01$) than women in the control group at 5 days postpartum.

Conclusions: Auricular acupressure is an effective non-pharmacological method for reducing cortisol levels, heart rate, anxiety, and fatigue in early postpartum after caesarean section.

Keywords: Acupressure; Anxiety; Auricular; Caesarean section; Cortisol; Fatigue; Postpartum; Randomised controlled trial.

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