

Ear Acupoints for Trauma Recovery and Healing

National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) in collaboration with the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)



A simple ear point stimulation technique can offer support for hard times. Based upon our experience as NADA providers, small magnetic beads or seeds can be taped to points on the external ear by any volunteer with brief training yielding surprisingly powerful effects.

The location

When looking at the ear, you will see an oval-shaped depression at the top of the ear. Near and slightly above the tip of that shaded area, lies a point called Shen Men, "Spirit Gate." If you put your thumb on the front and your forefinger on the back of your own ear, near the top, you will be holding Shen Men and behind it, Reverse Shen Men. Veins or color changes can be additional landmarks for Reverse Shen Men.

Choosing the placement

Both locations have been successfully used in post-disaster/trauma responses.

Practitioners and recipients may have a preference. Reverse Shen Men is discrete and has less contact when sleeping or using the phone. The Shen Men placement requires less moving of the ear.

The materials

We recommend using gold magnetic beads or Vaccaria/black radish seeds. They are secured to the ear by a small piece of tape and have tonifying, supportive properties.

The method

The most important instruction is to put the bead/seed where it seems like it should go, and then repeat with the other ear. Trust your instinct and your intention. Make sure the tape is securely pressed down. (It is not necessary to clean the ear first, but the tape may stick better if you do.) You can also put the beads/seeds on yourself.

After the beads/seeds are in place, the recipient can gently press on them or simply let them be. They can stay on until they fall off, which can be a week or longer, or the wearer can remove them and discard in the trash. Repeat as often as wanted varying the location if the ear looks irritated.

Note: This is a specific and limited protocol and does not imply competency in auricular therapy, acudetox, acupressure or acupuncture. This is a support, not a substitute, for medical and psychosocial care.

Testimonials Gathered From NADA Practitioners in the Field

A displaced woman who got beads post Super Storm Sandy reported "a warm sensation" in her body, and "a sense of relief." Others said that after several days with the beads, "the light was back in her eyes, the vacant stare had disappeared. Hope had replaced despair."

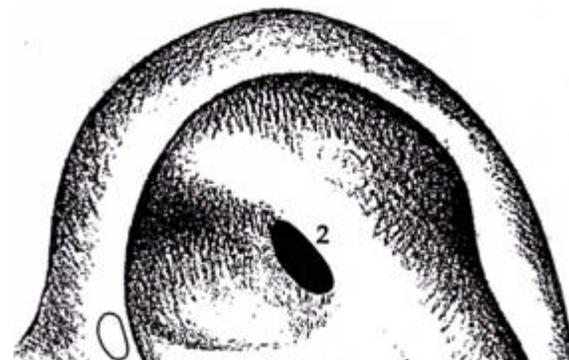
A NADA responder to the 2015 Nepal earthquake attests, "Most of the 112 children, ranging from infants to about age 14, treated with beads this day would have likely gone untreated if the beads were not an option," and "When I asked one boy how he felt after yesterday's bead treatment he said, 'very good, very happy.' He confirmed that he slept well. When I asked him if he felt like his old self, he surprised me with: 'No, I feel new'."

A NADA provider observed, "Marissa liked the beads so much she asked to learn how to put them on her son who has ADHD. A week later, she said her son had calmed down so much it seemed like he was on medication."

A social service worker noted, "The kinds of conversations I'm able to have with our students after a treatment are wildly different from the conversations I would have had without them [the beads]. The youth are more open, less afraid and more ready to embrace change."

From a Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) responder in Colorado: "I believe anyone can be trained to apply the beads and educate the recipient – why, where, how long, etc."

2. Ear Shen Men



Frequently Asked Questions

What have ear acupoints been used for?

Ear points have been used for supporting health for many years. Since the late 1990s, ear acupoint stimulation has become a common intervention in the wake of community trauma/disasters as part of the relief services provided. In addition, NADA members have found great benefit in supporting addiction and mental health recovery, infant withdrawal syndromes, and ADD/ADHD (primarily with Reverse Shen Men).

What is NADA?

The National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) is a nonprofit training and advocacy organization that encourages community wellness through the use of a standardized auricular acupuncture/acupressure protocol for behavioral health, including addictions, mental health, and disaster & emotional trauma.

What are the advantages of ear acupoints?

Ear Acupoints for Trauma Recovery and Healing with ear seeds/beads is safe, non-invasive, easy, and cheap. Recipients like it and report that it is helpful in terms of symptoms and overall well-being. It can be applied in any disaster response or community wellness initiative. Any volunteer can apply the beads/seeds with brief training. Local community members can also learn and continue using beads/seeds after the MRC response ends. Effects are both immediate and sustained. The beads/seeds do not interfere with movement or activity and are therefore ideal for first responders and trauma-affected populations.

Are there any reported side effects?

In NADA's experience, there have been few reported side effects. Sometimes the site is tender or gets irritated. On rare occasion, a person may experience discomfort, like flushing or a mild headache. Encourage recipients to remove the beads/seeds if they find the experience uncomfortable. Do not put beads/seeds on an open wound.

What is the difference between beads and seeds?

According to NADA's founder, Michael Smith, "Seeds have an energy of life, and last only a couple of days whereas beads can last much longer." Practitioners have used both effectively. We usually put on new ones weekly.

During an MRC response, how should the area where ear acupoints are provided be identified?

It could be called a "Stress Relief Station." Recipients can get beads/seeds while standing. When possible, have people sit for a few minutes together after getting their beads/seeds to augment the effect.

What research supports using ear acupoints for trauma?

Some literature supports the use of ear acupressure (with this and similar protocols) integrated with appropriate interventions. A study of post-caesarian section women using seeds on the Shen Men point found reduced anxiety, fatigue and cortisol levels compared to usual care.

Kuo, S.-Y., Tsai, S.-H., Chen, S.-L., Tzeng, Y.-L. (2016) Auricular acupressure relieves anxiety and fatigue and reduces cortisol levels in post-caesarean section women: A single-blind, randomised controlled study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 53, 17-26.

<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2015.10.006>



What happens if a person is allergic to the tape?

You can purchase beads on non-latex tape. They are a little more expensive but available. Intolerances to the beads and tape are very rare.

How do I purchase ear beads/seeds?

Ear beads/seeds are available from vendors such as ACP Medical Supplies, Acurea, Helio, Lhasa OMS and other online companies. There are many brands and names (acupoint plasters, ear massage beads, ear seeds, magnetic pellets, etc.). Products vary by packaging, adhesive, material and price but are generally equally effective. Be sure to get a product that is designated "ear" or "auricular". Suppliers usually offer quantity discounts.

Do I need other equipment/tools?

Some people like to use tweezers, but they are not necessary. Some MRC responses prefer or require that all physical contact involves gloves. Otherwise, gloves are cumbersome and unnecessary.

By choosing to use this protocol, I agree to the following statement about responsible, ethical use: I understand that learning this does not make me an acupuncturist or auriculotherapist and I will not present myself in that way. I will not make inappropriate claims about expected outcomes. I offer ear acupoints as a specific and limited protocol to support, not substitute, medical and psychosocial care. I will not use, or withhold, this protocol punitively or for financial gain. I will comply with all local laws and regulations.