

Acupressure seen to calm children before surgery

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Acupressure helps calm anxious children right before they get anesthesia for surgery, without the nausea and other side-effects caused by sedatives, U.S. researchers reported on Tuesday.

Taping an acupressure bead between the eyebrows reduced anxiety noticeably in the children, compared to a similar sham treatment, Dr. Zeev Kain of the University of California Irvine and colleagues reported.

"Anxiety in children before surgery is bad because of the emotional toll on the child and parents, and this anxiety can lead to prolonged recovery and the increased use of analgesics for postoperative pain," Kain said in a statement.

"What's great about the use of acupressure is that it costs very little and has no side effects."

Acupressure and acupuncture both are based on the theory of lines of energy running through the body. With acupressure, a fingertip or a bead is used to press a specific pressure point, while needles are used in acupuncture.

Several studies have shown both treatments may stimulate the release of hormones known as endorphins, which can relieve stress, pain and nausea.

Kain's team tested 52 children aged 8 to 17 who were about to have stomach surgery. Half got a bead taped to the Extra-1 acupoint -- one of the points used to reduce stress in both acupuncture and acupressure therapy.

The other half got a similar patch on a spot above the left eyebrow

that had no reported clinical effects.

After half an hour, the treated children were less anxious, while the young patients who got the sham treatment were clearly more anxious, Kain's team reported in the journal *Anesthesia & Analgesia*.

"As anesthesiologists, we need to look at all therapeutic opportunities to make the surgical process less stressful for all patients," Kain said. "We can't assume that Western medical approaches are the only viable ones, and we have an obligation to look at integrative treatments like acupuncture as a way to improve the surgery experience."