

# UCSF E.A.R.S. Program

Ear Acupressure for the  
Resiliency of Staff

2024 Community Wellbeing  
Grant

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## Overview

Ear acupressure seeds have been shown to reduce stress, insomnia, and anxiety and help prevent burn-out in healthcare providers.

The UCSF E.A.R.S. Program provided self-care ear acupressure tools and training for 600 UCSF pediatric staff. Pre and post surveys were completed by 114 participants who received \$5 gift cards.

## Data Snapshot

66% of program participants perceived that ear seeds benefitted them

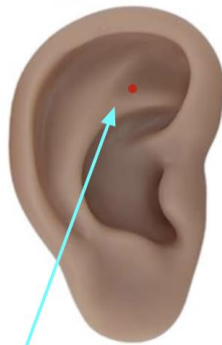
52% reported stress reduction  
39% improved mood  
33% improved relaxation  
32% improved sleep

92% of participants thought that ear seeds could be beneficial for patient and patient families

## Resources

<https://www.earseeds.com/skintone-collection/>

<https://www.earseedsacademy.com/>



"Shenmen" point (red ● above) is located in the apex of the triangular fossa, at the divide of the inferior & superior branches of the antihelix.

Shenmen ("Spirit Gate") is an acupressure point located on the ear.

Shenmen has been used to **promote relaxation and calmness** for more than 2000 years in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Modern studies show that acupressure seeds applied at Shenmen can **reduce anxiety and burnout** in healthcare providers by promoting parasympathetic activity ("rest and digest") in the entire body.\*

Ear acupressure can be applied using fingers, a pencil eraser, or with specially-made "ear stickers" that are metal beads, magnets or **natural plant seeds attached to an adhesive bandage**.

Ear acupressure is simple, fun and effective!

\* Olshani-Perlmutter M, Carter K, Marx J. Auricular acupressure reduces anxiety and burnout in behavioral healthcare. Appl Nurs Res. 2019 Oct;49:57-63. doi: 10.1016/j.apnr.2019.05.011. Epub 2019 May 19. PMID: 31160145.

## Project Details

All healthcare providers and staff at 3 UCSF locations were informed about the project by email, on-site announcements, and flyers at each work site. The project was active from May 1-31st, along with "Mental Health Awareness Month."

A total of about 600 'E.A.R.S.' 4x6 printed cards (with detailed diagrams, instructions, QR link to pre and post surveys) with attached 12 ear seeds were placed in highly visible work site areas.

500 staff picked up the cards, read the instructions, placed the ear seeds on the specific point of each ear for a variable number of days, with a goal of using seeds for 7 consecutive days. 114 (22%) participants used the QR code to fill out both pre- and post- surveys. Survey results were statistically analyzed and provided to participants. Gift cards were mailed to survey respondents.

Pre-survey respondents identified as their top priorities for the intervention: stress reduction (99/114, 87%), relaxation (73/114, 64%), improved mood (66/114, 58%), and improved sleep (59/114, 52%). Post-survey respondents reported actual benefit for: **stress reduction** (59/114, 52%), **relaxation** (38/114, 33%), **improved mood** (44/114, 39%), and **improved sleep** (36/114, 32%) .

*"I felt so at ease the week I was wearing my ear seeds- normally I am pretty anxious and burnt out. Wearing the ear seeds was the only thing I changed, and it has made such a difference!"*

*"I was not expecting to experience the benefits that I did with this program. I felt a marked reduction in anxiety and stress, to the point that "ear seeds!" became my answer to why things were going well during the week that I trialed them. I also think my sleep was improved (at my age this is a huge benefit)!"*

## Project Challenges

We found that personal one-on-one connection and description of the program between program leads and staff to be most effective recruitment method, in addition to recruitment posters in the workplace and emails.

We also found staff open to ear acupressure wellness practices. Encouraging consistent participation was a challenge, compounded by the need to complete pre- and post-program surveys to track effectiveness and employee satisfaction. We had 114 participants complete both the pre- and post-surveys with gift card incentive; shy of our goal of 150 participants.

Ensuring compliance with the correct placement of acupressure ear seeds adds another layer of difficulty, as precise application is important for therapeutic benefits. Overcoming these challenges requires clear communication, education about the benefits of auricular acupuncture, and providing adequate support to ensure staff feel comfortable and engaged throughout the program.

## Lessons Learned

The E.A.R.S. wellness program for staff provided valuable lessons learned regarding employee engagement and program effectiveness. One key insight was the importance of comprehensive education on the correct placement of ear seeds. Feedback included requests for more education and resources.

Another significant lesson was the appreciation among staff for a wellness program that was easy to use with minimal risk and substantial potential benefits. Participants reported noticeable improvements in managing stress, anxiety reduction, alleviation of pain, enhanced sleep quality, and improved mood. 63% (75/114) participants reported the program was "likely" and "very likely" to have benefited them.

These positive outcomes underscore the E.A.R.S. program value in promoting holistic well-being within UCSF and highlights the importance of fun, effective wellness initiatives tailored to employees' needs.