

# Auricular Acupressure Improves Habit Reversal Treatment for Nail Biting

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**Published Online:** 18 Jan 2019 |

**Doi:** <https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2018.0063>

## Abstract

**Objective:** Nail biting leads to a variety of health issues. Habit reversal treatment is a major approach to cease nail biting, but is often ineffective since patients continue to suffer from anxiety, a major trigger. This study investigated whether the potential anxiety relief provided by auricular acupressure could improve the efficacy of habit reversal treatment, as evidenced by improved stomatological and other outcomes.

**Methods:** In a pragmatic, randomized, crossover, pilot clinical trial, 83 nail biters (8–12 years old) received habit reversal treatment in combination with either auricular acupressure intended to reduce anxiety (Method A) or placebo auricular acupressure (Method B). The alternative protocol was employed after a two-month washout period. The primary outcome measured was the 41-item child self-reported version of the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders, while the secondary outcomes were the nail growth status (NS), which represented the fingernail growth of each finger during habit reversal treatment, simplified plaque index (SPI), and the simplified gingival index (SGI) as measures of oral health. A paired sample *t*-test was used to assess the differences between Methods A and B, and the differences in the anxiety scores, NS, SGI, and SPI between the baseline and each time point.

**Results:** Forty-one children successfully completed both arms of the treatments and attended all appointments. There were significant differences in the efficacy of habit reversal treatment, the anxiety score, the nail status, and the SGI in favor of Method A ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Auricular acupressure appears to improve the efficacy of habit reversal treatment, likely by reducing anxiety.