



H-W Photo/Michael Kipley

Sarah Felts gets a treatment called cranial-electrotherapy stimulation during a recent session at Jerry Walker Therapy Services Quincy. An Alpha-Stim device delivers microcurrent through clips attached to the earlobes, which realigns electrical flow in cells to calm and settle the brain. Cranial electrotherapy stimulation has been FDA approved to treat anxiety, depression and insomnia.

'Hope Through Microcurrent'

Alpha-Stim therapy can help treat anxiety, depression insomnia

By Kelly Wilson

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An almost imperceptible delivery of electrical current has the power to treat anxiety, depression and insomnia, says local therapist Jerry Walker.

"I've had some very good results with it," said Walker, who has been using a device called Alpha-Stim with certain clients since last fall. The device delivers microcurrent using a method called cranial electrotherapy stimulation (CES), which has been FDA approved to treat the three conditions.

"It's a very non-threatening device," Walker said. "It takes the natural current every cell in our body has and realigns the electrical flow. By doing that, it calms and settles the person's brain." The microcurrent is delivered through clips that attach on the earlobes.

"We put two ear clips on and we calibrate it at a setting specific to that person," Walker said.

"It's a very mild current. Some people have a mild tingling sensation. But some don't even notice it." He says within minutes, a client will notice a calming effect.

Promotional materials for Alpha-Stim say that anxiety reduction is usually experienced during treatment- insomnia and depression control are generally experienced after two to three weeks of daily treatment.

The calming effect comes about because the microcurrent activates particular groups of cells in the brainstem that produce the chemicals serotonin and acetylcholine.

"It increases alpha brain wave activity, which is more of a calming brain wave," Walker said. Walker says studies have shown that Alpha-Stim has 60 to 80 percent efficacy. No significant side effects have been reported.

"It has been compared to Prozac, Zoloft and Effexor. It has done equally well or better in each of the studies in efficacy and cost," he said. In a 2004 article in Southern Medical Journal, CES is touted as a safe treatment for anxiety,

depression or insomnia.

"CES is a treatment modality that has been neglected by mainstream medicine for the treatment of anxiety, depression or insomnia," said the authors, Dr.

Marshall Gilula and Dr. Paul Barach of the Department of Anesthesiology, Center for Patient Safety, Jackson Memorial Hospital and the University of Miami School of Medicine in Miami.

"CES is not a miraculous modality, but it's definitely worth a try." The article notes that 126 human and 29 experimental animal studies of CES have been conducted over the past 40 years, with more than half from peer-reviewed literature. The authors say the majority of the studies were double-blinded and conducted at major American universities.

"In aggregate, there were 6,007 patients treated under varying research conditions, with 4,541 actually receiving CES treatment. One hundred twelve

(89 percent) of the studies reported positive

outcomes," the authors said.

Walker says those findings match the anecdotal evidence he's seen in his practice.

"The response has been spectacular. I've had some people in here near an anxiety attack, and it's calmed them down," he said.

"This gives options outside pharmacology (the use of medications)," Walker added. "I'm not against pharmacology, but I know patients like options." He emphasizes that people who are taking medications for anxiety, depression or insomnia should only discontinue their use under the direction of a physician.

Walker also warns that Alpha-Stim shouldn't be used by people who are pregnant or who have a pacemaker.

In addition to use in the clinical setting, which costs about \$45 a session, an Alpha-Stim device can be bought or leased for home use. The treatment method is covered by some insurance plans.

For more information, call Jerry Walker Therapy Services at (217) 228-6194.