

The effect of therapeutic touch on behavioral symptoms and cortisol in persons with dementia

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BACKGROUND: Between 75-90% of nursing home (NH) residents with dementia develop behavioral symptoms (BSD) which may be associated with a stress response. Therapeutic touch has been shown to decrease restlessness in NH residents, however the mechanism is unknown. The purpose of this randomized controlled trial (RCT) was to examine the effect of therapeutic touch on BSD and basal cortisol levels among NH residents with dementia. **PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS:** Using a double blind experimental interrupted time series ABAB design, 65 participants were assigned to one of three groups. The experimental group received therapeutic touch with contact on the neck and shoulders delivered twice daily for 3 days (administered over 2 separate treatment periods); the placebo group received a mimic treatment identical in appearance, and the control group received routine care. Study outcomes were BSD, measured by the modified Agitated Behavior Rating Scale (mABRS), and salivary cortisol levels, measured by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). **RESULTS:** 64 residents, aged 67-93 years (M = 85.5, SD = 5.50), completed the study. Restlessness was significantly reduced in the experimental group compared to the control group ($p = 0.03$). There was a significant difference in morning cortisol variability among groups across time periods (Forsch Komplementmed. 2009 Jun;16(3):181-9. Epub 2009 Jun 5. Woods DL, Beck C, Sinha K. School of Nursing, University of California Los Angeles, CA 90095-6919, USA. lwoods@sonnet.ucla.edu
