Depression is known to be associated with physical illnesses, immune function, and mortality from suicide.[1] Given the pharmacological therapy limitations in treating depression, other non-invasive complementary methods integrated with mainstream medicine must be explored. Auriculotherapy (AT), an approach involving traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), is proposed as a therapy for patients suffering from depression, wherein specific points on the auricle are punctured or stimulated to treat various disorders of the body.[2] It is a specialized form of acupuncture that treats the ear as a microsystem of the body.[3]
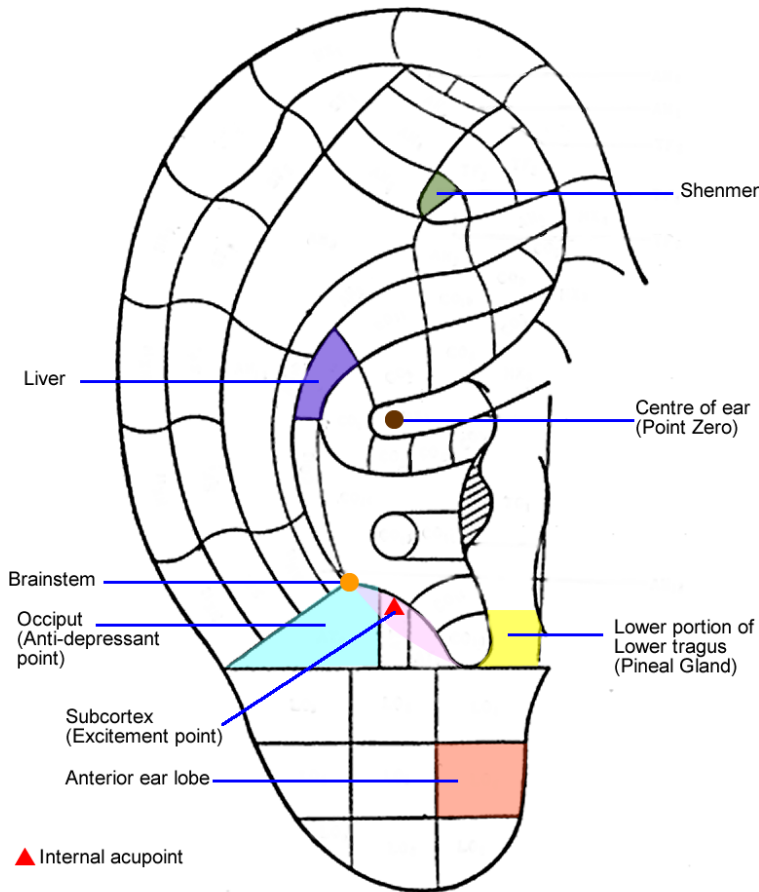
In AT, eight auricular points that can relieve depressive status are identified (Table 1). The Chinese Standard Ear-Acupoints Chart, which is recognized by the World Health Organization, is used to locate the points (Figure 1). The selection of points was based on the "organ" theory of Chinese medicine as well as perspectives in Western medicine. Depression is associated with defects in the neurotransmitters (norepinephrine, dopamine, and serotonin) in the brain[4]; thus, a number of selected auricular points correspond to the different parts of the brain. The treatment protocol included the application of magnetic pellets starting on either the left ear or the right ear. Only one ear received treatment at a time, with each ear treated alternately, for a total treatment of four weeks. After the first application, the magnetic pellets were retained on the acupoints for one week, and then a new set of pellets was applied on the opposite ear in a similar fashion. To enhance the treatment effect, the pellets were applied to the reactive region of each identified acupoint as detected by an acupoint detector. The effect of the treatment was evaluated using the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale and the Subjective Happiness Scale. Based on the clinical experiences of the authors, AT provides a holistic, convenient, non-painful, hygienic, and risk-free therapy to help patients with depression.

Table 1: Specific auricular points for depression

Auricular points	Rationale
Shenmen	To calm the mind
Liver	"Liver" is associated with emotion from the TCM perspective
Occiput	Also known as "Antidepressant point"[3]
Subcortex	Also known as "Excitement point", for anti-depression, and calms the mind.[3]
Anterior ear lobe (lower portion)	Also known as "Master Cerebral", and near "Be happy point" which is located on the back of the ear.[3, 5]
Centre of ear	Also known as "Point zero", for achieving general homeostatic balance[3]

Brainstem	Also known as "Brain"[3]
Lower tragus (lower portion)	Also known as "Pineal Gland"[3]

Figure 1: Location of auricular points for depression

Location of auricular points for depression

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