ABSTRACT

Floatation Therapy for Chronic Headaches
A case study evaluating floatation therapy for chronic headaches
Dr. David A. Berv, CCSP, Dipl. Ac
February 2018

Background

Chronic headaches and head pain can be distracting, disabling, and consuming. Headache triggers are not always obvious and may include other lifestyle factors such as allergies, work and sleep environments or personal habits. Further, headache "medicine" does not necessarily mitigate all the various contributing causes and can even be a part of the problem. In the midst of our opioid crisis, options and alternatives to medications are now on the rise and gaining attention. One option that has been showing tremendous promise is that of float therapy, or floating.

Objective

The objective of this case study is to observe the effects of four (4) weeks of float therapy upon the intensity and frequency of chronic headaches, irrespective of the type of headache, and the collateral/related effects of sleep, anxiety, focus/productivity, activities of daily living, hearing and vision.

A second objective is to determine if there is any difference between floating one (1) vs. two (2) times a week for the same time period.

Method

Participants were sought through an online screening process based on the following criteria: (a) chronic headaches for more than 1 year (self-rated as greater than 5 on a numerical 0-10 pain scale with 0=none and 10 =extreme pain); (b) no prior history of floating; (c) no surgery for this condition; (d) not taking diploids, and (e) not currently receiving medical treatment or alternative medicine intervention including injections or therapy.

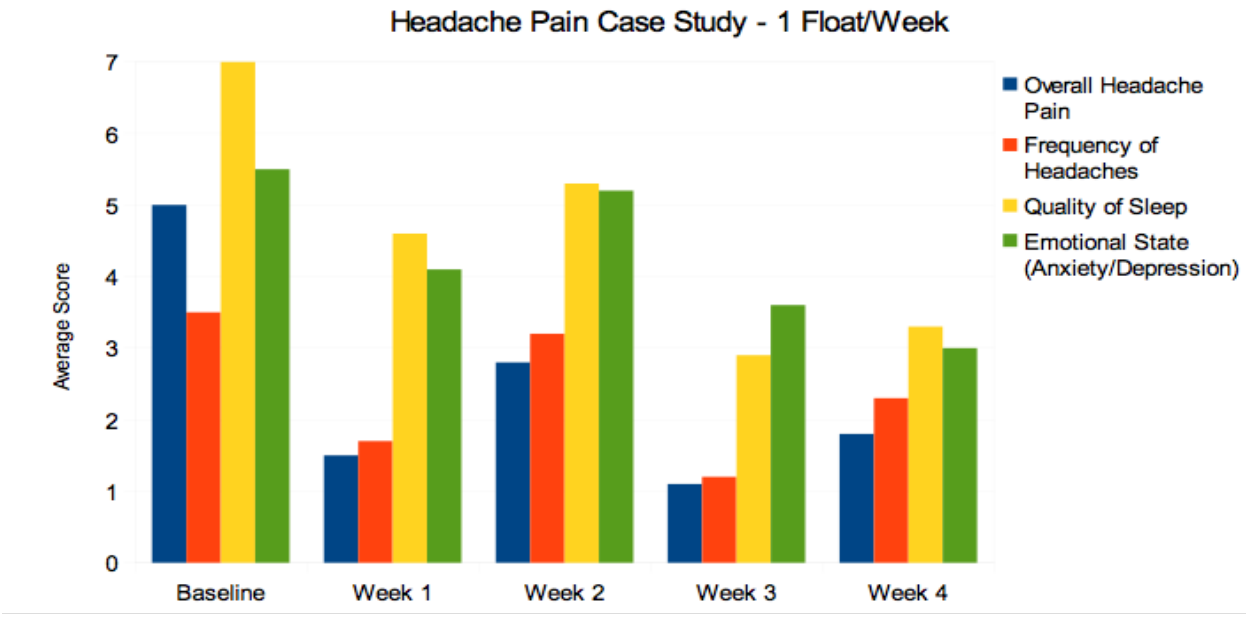
Fourteen (14) individuals were selected, and eight (8), all female, elected to participate. They were then randomly divided into two equal groups.

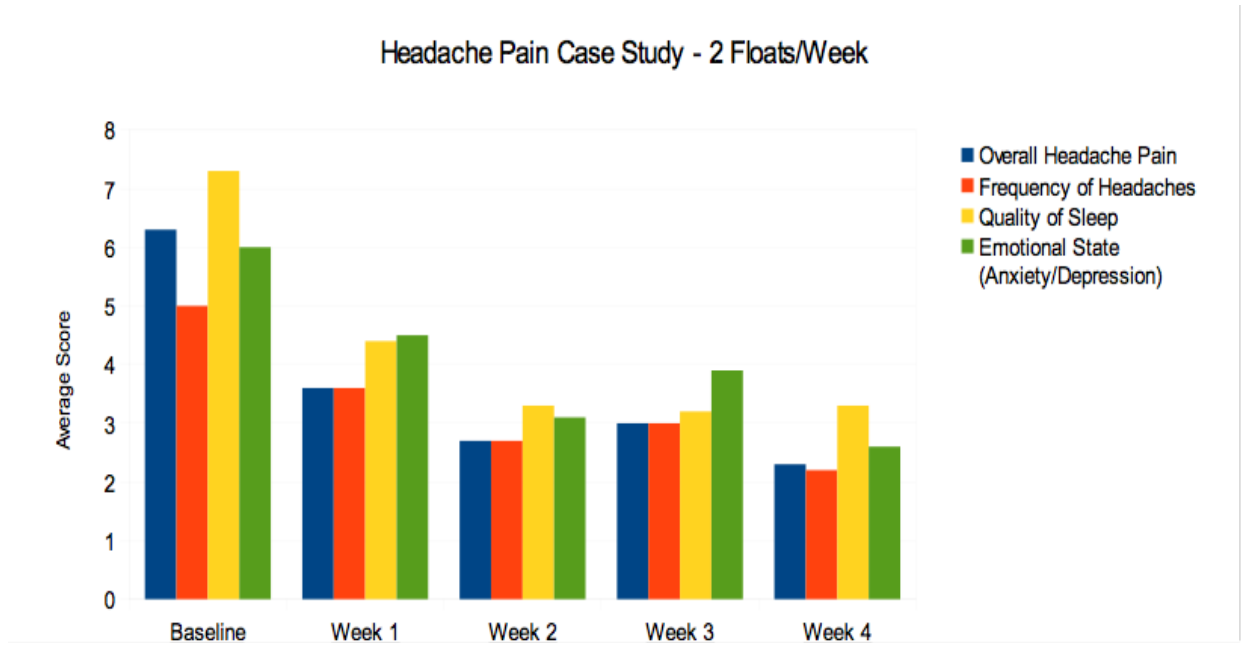
The intervention for this case study involved "floating" in a 9' long x 5' wide fiberglass tank with a hinged lid, shaped like a large egg and filled with 175 gallons (10" deep) of a salt solution. This solution contains 1000 pounds of medical grade Epsom salt, or magnesium sulfate ($MgSO_4$) and is maintained at skin temperature (approximately 94 degrees F). The individual closes the float tank lid and then transitions onto a supine (face up) position and begins to float effortlessly. The study lasted four (4) weeks in duration and involved two random groupings of four participants per group. Group A floated once a week for four weeks for a total of 4 floats. Group B floated twice a week for four weeks, for a total of 8 floats. A daily subjective survey was completed by each individual, using a numeric scale on a 0-10 continuum with descriptors

(0=best, 10=worst). For purposes of comparison, a baseline survey with the same questions was completed by the participants prior to their first float.

There was no interaction with the participants during the course of the study. There was no cost for the participants and there was no financial gain from The Float Zone, where the case study took place. There are no other disclosures.

Results





Results of Specific Categories:
Headache Pain Intensity: Group A improved 63.33%. Group B improved 63.08%
Frequency of Headaches: Group A improved 34.92% Group B improved 56.92%
Quality of Sleep: Group A improved 56.30%. Group B improved 54.38%
Emotional State: Group A improved 45.45%. Group B improved 56.41%
Headache affect on Vision: Group A improved 54.17%. Group B improved 71.54%
Affect on hearing: Group A improved 75.31%. Group B improved 71.54%
Affect on daily activities: Group A improved 61.90%. Group B improved 61.54%
Affect on productivity/focus: Group A improved 65.28%. Group B improved 72.44%

Conclusion

Floatation therapy, or floating, has a direct and positive effect on reducing both the intensity and frequency of chronic headaches, as well as improving sleep quality, emotional state and other associated symptoms including vision and hearing. There were no negative effects.

Float frequency (2 floats/week vs. 1 float/week) does makes a difference in the frequency of headache episodes, as well as with improving emotional state. However, for other areas, including headache intensity, sleep, focus/productivity and activities of daily living, it was more the intervention itself, rather than the frequency of floating, that made the difference. Therefore, in this case, the intervention of floating regularly for 4 weeks is effective regardless of the frequency of floating.

Patients, medical professionals and alternative health care providers should consider floatation therapy by itself and in tandem with other mind/body approaches to manage chronic headaches.