



**Title**      **A Summary of the Evidence for use of Acupuncture from Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses**

**Agency**    **VATAP, VA Technology Assessment Program**

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**Reference**    VA Technology Assessment Program Report, Final Report, May 2007.  
www4.va.gov/VATAP/docs/Acupuncture2007tagm.pdf

## **Aim**

To summarize the best available evidence of the safety and efficacy of acupuncture to inform the scope of practice in VA (Veteran Affairs).

## **Conclusions and results**

Literature searches for acupuncture identified 488 unique references published since 1990 including 121 meta-analyses, 170 Cochrane Library systematic reviews, 87 other published systematic reviews, and 17 guidelines. The Technology Assessment Program (TAP) identified the three most recent and comprehensive reports that catalogued evidence of the efficacy and safety of acupuncture over a wide range of indications. These reports served as the basis for the review. While acupuncture appears to be a safe procedure based on these results, the results highlight the overall poor quality of studies and reporting in the evidence base.

## **Recommendations**

No acupuncture procedure warranted either a Level A or Level D recommendation. Indications that received a Level B recommendation (sufficient, strong, and consistent evidence of positive effect) were for relief of acute dental pain associated with tooth extraction and treatment of postoperative- and chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting. A Level C recommendation (evidence is trending positive, but insufficient) was issued for the short-term relief of osteoarthritis, knee pain, and chronic low back pain, migraine and idiopathic headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, and fibromyalgia. The evidence was inconclusive (Level I) for acupuncture use in carpal tunnel syndrome, addiction, stroke rehabilitation, and asthma.

## **Methods**

The VA Technology Assessment Program (TAP) carried out scoping searches of the general CAM literature and detailed searches of acupuncture. Detailed literature searches were performed between September 2006 and February 2007 in the following databases: MEDLINE,

SCI-Search, EMBASE, Current Contents, and BIOSIS. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews was searched separately. A quality filter was applied to identify the highest quality evidence from clinical trials, RCTs, guidelines, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. US Preventive Services Task Force classification for grading the strength of policy recommendations based on scientific evidence was applied.

## **Further research/reviews required**

Additional monitoring of the literature is needed to identify new, high-quality evidence of the effectiveness of acupuncture.