



Title	Acupuncture: Evidence from Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
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Aim

To systematically review the scientific evidence and analyze the evidence from systematic reviews on the effectiveness of acupuncture for any condition.

Conclusions and results

The included reviews (n=23) covered dental/temperomandibular dysfunction pain, headache, tinnitus, asthma, stroke rehabilitation, antiemesis, neck/back pain, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, induction of labor, addiction, smoking cessation, and weight reduction. There were wide variations in methods, eg, manual or electrical stimulation, number of needles per treatment, needle insertion technique, and treatment frequency. All of these factors may influence the outcome.

Acupuncture is relatively safe, but may have minor (eg, fainting) and serious (eg, hepatitis) adverse effects. Techniques differ across cultures and practitioner groups, and these variations are associated with different risks. The rate of adverse events varies by the condition being treated and body part involved. Overall, the rate of reported, serious adverse events was low.

The evidence supports acupuncture as an effective treatment for dental pain and postoperative nausea and vomiting. Evidence for other conditions, eg, idiopathic headache, chronic pain, smoking, and fibromyalgia, was inconclusive. Most reviews with a good quality rating found acupuncture to be as effective, in the short-term, as conventional or no treatment for these conditions. However, better quality research is needed. There was no indication as to the specific acupuncture method that is most appropriate for treating dental pain. For treating postoperative nausea and vomiting, acupuncture was shown to be effective in adults, except when administered under anesthesia.

Recommendations

Many issues in acupuncture research require further study. Based on the limited evidence, it would appear premature for regional health authorities to implement

an acupuncture program, other than for postoperative nausea and vomiting for selected indications and patients. For all other conditions the effect of acupuncture is unclear, and its clinical value is questionable. Due to the lack of detail on service providers, it was not possible to associate treatment effect, or lack of effect, with the expertise/training of the provider.

Methods

A systematic review of the literature published from 1990 to July 2001, and an appraisal of the quality was conducted. The search included MEDLINE (Ovid) and PreMEDLINE, HealthSTAR (Ovid), Best Evidence (Ovid), CINAHL (Ovid), EMBASE (Ovid), AMED (Ovid), Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, CMA practice guidelines- CPG infobase, National Guideline Clearinghouse, DARE, HTA, EED; www: ECRI, Bandolier, and other HTA agency websites. This report was externally reviewed by 5 methodological or field experts.