

Brinkhaus B, Becker-Witt C, Jena S, Weber K, Linde K, Streng A et al. Efficacy of acupuncture in patients with chronic low back pain - the Acupuncture Randomised Trial (ART). *FACT* 2003; 8(4):486.

Efficacy of acupuncture in patients with chronic low back pain - the Acupuncture Randomised Trials (ART)

Objective

In a randomised controlled trial we investigated whether acupuncture is more effective compared to no acupuncture or minimal acupuncture in patients with chronic low back pain.

Materials and methods

Patients (age >40 years) with chronic low back pain (symptom duration >6 months) were randomised to treatment with semi-standardised acupuncture (AC), minimal acupuncture (MA) or to waiting list control (WL). AC and MA were administered by specialised acupuncture physicians in 31 outpatient centers and consisted each of 12 sessions per patient over 8 weeks. Patients completed standardised questionnaires at baseline and end of week 8 including assessment of pain intensity (VAS 0-100 mm) and back function (FFbH-R).

Results

A total of 298 patients (68% female, 59±9 years) were included from March to October 2002. Change in pain intensity (VAS) from baseline to 8 weeks was significantly different between AC and WL (-28.7±30.3 mm vs. -6.9±22.0 mm, $p < 0.001$) and not significantly different between AC and MA (-28.7 ±30.3 mm vs. -23.6±31.0 mm, $p=0.256$). Similarly, back function at week 8 demonstrated a significant difference between AC and WL (66.8±18.3 vs 57.7±19.9, $p=0.001$), and no difference between AC and MA (66.8±18.3 vs 62.9±20.3, $p=0.165$).

Conclusion

Acupuncture in patients with chronic low back pain was associated with marked improvement of pain intensity and back function compared to no acupuncture treatment. However, no significant differences were found between acupuncture and minimal acupuncture.