

Acupuncture Can Help Clear A Chronic Pain In The Neck

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There is moderate evidence that acupuncture can relieve chronic neck pain. Between 26 - 71 percent of the adult population claims to have had at least one episode of neck pain or stiffness during their life. In many cases, this can last for months and has a large impact on life style, work and health care expenditure.

Acupuncture is one of the complementary medicines that is frequently used. A group of Canadian-led Cochrane Review Authors completed a systematic review of the research literature to see whether there is evidence that it works.

They found 10 trials, with a total of 661 participants, which investigated whether acupuncture alleviated neck pain. In nine of the trials, participants had suffered neck pain for three or more months, while one included people who had had pain for at least six weeks.

To assess whether acupuncture reduces pain at all, some trials compared acupuncture with "sham" or "placebo" treatments. In other trials, the researchers were trying to see how well acupuncture worked compared to another treatment.

Overall, people who received acupuncture reported better pain relief immediately after treatment than those who received sham treatments such as TENS or laser that had the machines switched off, or acupuncture with the needles inserted in the wrong place. People who had acupuncture also reported that their pain went away to a greater extent than those who were just on a list waiting for treatment. In one small trial, people who received acupuncture reported better pain relief in the short-term than those who received massage therapy. There were no serious side effects reported in any of these trials.

"What we need now are some trials that include greater numbers of people and look at the long-term effect of the treatment," says lead Review Author Dr Kien Trinh who works in McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada.

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