

Effects of Acupuncture on Cancer-Related Fatigue

Zhang Y1, et al.

PURPOSE: This study was designed to critically evaluate the effect of acupuncture on cancer-related fatigue (CRF).

METHODS: Seven databases (Cochrane Library, Embase, Medline, Web of Science, CBM, Wanfang, and CNKI) were systematically reviewed from inception to November 2016 for randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Two reviewers critically and independently assessed the risk of bias using Cochrane Collaboration criteria and extracted correlated data using the designed form. All analyses were performed with Review Manager 5.

RESULTS: Ten RCTs, including 1327 patients (acupuncture, 733; control, 594), meeting the inclusion criteria for the meta-analysis were identified. Acupuncture had a marked effect on fatigue in cancer patients, regardless of concurrent anti-cancer treatment, particularly among breast cancer patients. The meta-analysis also indicated that acupuncture could significantly mitigate CRF compared with sham acupuncture or usual care. Acupuncture for 20-30 min/session three times/week for two or three weeks, twice weekly for two weeks and weekly for six weeks, and weekly for six weeks had substantial effects on CRF. Six RCTs reported the occurrence of adverse events, whereas five reported none. The remaining study reported some manageable events, including spot bleeding and bruising.

CONCLUSIONS: Acupuncture is effective for CRF management and should be recommended as a beneficial alternative therapy for CRF patients, particularly for breast cancer patients and those currently undergoing anti-cancer treatment.

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