

## A Systematic Review of Acupuncture for Chronic Low-back Pain

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The objective of this review was to assess the effectiveness of needle acupuncture for chronic low-back pain. Acupuncture was compared to no treatment, sham acupuncture and to other therapies.

For this review we used the search strategy recommended by the Cochrane Back Review Group on MEDLINE, EMBASE, and CENTRAL with no language restriction, up to July 2008. We only included randomized controlled trials. The quality appraisal was performed with the 11-item recommended by the Cochrane Back Review Group (Van Tulder et al, 2003).

Three trials (1 high and 2 low quality) showed that acupuncture was better than no treatment for both measures of pain and function. But these measures were taken only in the short-term.

Six trials (3 high and 3 low quality) showed no difference between acupuncture and sham acupuncture on both measures of pain and function. But two high quality trials showed some benefit of acupuncture over sham acupuncture.

Five trials (4 high and 1 low quality) compared acupuncture to various treatments (massage, self-care, conventional therapy, TENS and spinal manipulation) and they showed variable results.

Seven trials (five high and 2 low quality) showed consistently the benefits of adding acupuncture to other therapies, compared to the other therapies alone, which included mostly exercises and physiotherapy.

In conclusion,

- Acupuncture is better than no treatment
- There is inconclusive evidence against sham acupuncture - more studies are needed to demonstrate benefits beyond placebo
- Acupuncture is no better than other treatments
- There is consistent evidence for the addition of acupuncture to other therapies