

Reviews of chronic pain on acupuncture in the Japanese literature

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Context: Many Japanese reports of acupuncture and moxibustion for chronic pain are not listed in medical databases such as Medline. Therefore, they are not easily accessible to researchers outside Japan.

Objective: To complement existing reviews of acupuncture and moxibustion on chronic pain and to provide more detailed discussion and analysis.

Data Sources: Literature search using 'Igaku Chuo Zasshi Wed' (Japana Centra Revuo Medicina) and 'Citation Information by National Institute of Information' covering the period of 1978-2006.

Study Selection: Included were original articles and case reports related to the effects acupuncture and moxibustion treatment on chronic pain. Animal studies, surveys, and news articles were excluded.

Data Extraction: Two independent reviewers extracted data from articles in a pre-defined structured way, and assessed the likelihood of causality in each individual case.

Results: We located 57 papers written in Japanese (20 full papers, 37 cases reports). Conditions examined were headaches (12 trials), chronic low back pain (9 trials), rheumatology (8 trials), temporomandibular dysfunction (8 trials), katakori (8 trials) and others (12 trials). Of the 57 located papers, 23 were described as clinical trials (CCTs), although 11 were employed as quasi-random methods. Applying the 5-point Jadad quality assessment scoring system, the mean score was 1.5 ± 1.3 (SD). Eleven (52%) of the CCTs were conducted to determine a more effective acupuncture procedure. These trials compared different types of acupuncture practices, or compared specific additional points. In particular, the trigger point acupuncture was widely used to treat chronic low back pain in Japan.

Conclusion: Many reports of acupuncture and moxibustion on chronic pain are listed in Japanese databases. From these results, we conclude that there is limited evidence that acupuncture is more effective for chronic pain than no treatment. In addition, there is inconclusive evidence that trigger point acupuncture is more effective in chronic low back pain than other acupuncture methods.

Keywords : chronic pain, acupuncture, Japanese literature, clinical controlled trials