Acupuncture for patients with migraine: a randomized controlled trial.


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CONTEXT: Acupuncture is widely used to prevent migraine attacks, but the available evidence of its benefit is scarce. OBJECTIVE: To investigate the effectiveness of acupuncture compared with sham acupuncture and with no acupuncture in patients with migraine. DESIGN, SETTING, AND PATIENTS: Three-group, randomized, controlled trial (April 2002-January 2003) involving 302 patients (88% women), mean (SD) age of 43 (11) years, with migraine headaches, based on International Headache Society criteria. Patients were treated at 18 outpatient centers in Germany. INTERVENTIONS: Acupuncture, sham acupuncture, or waiting list control. Acupuncture and sham acupuncture were administered by specialized physicians and consisted of 12 sessions per patient over 8 weeks. Patients completed headache diaries from 4 weeks before to 12 weeks after randomization and from week 21 to 24 after randomization. MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: Difference in headache days of moderate or severe intensity between the 4 weeks before and weeks 9 to 12 after randomization. RESULTS: Between baseline and weeks 9 to 12, the mean (SD) number of days with headache of moderate or severe intensity decreased by 2.2 (2.7) days from a baseline of 5.2 (2.5) days in the acupuncture group compared with a decrease to 2.2 (2.7) days from a baseline of 5.0 (2.4) days in the sham acupuncture group, and by 0.8 (2.0) days from a baseline of 5.4 (3.0) days in the waiting list group. No difference was detected between the acupuncture and the sham acupuncture groups (0.0 days, 95% confidence interval, -0.7 to 0.7 days; P = .96) while there was a difference between the acupuncture group compared with the waiting list group (1.4 days; 95% confidence interval; 0.8-2.1 days; P<.001). The proportion of responders (reduction in headache days by at least 50%) was 51% in the acupuncture group, 53% in the sham acupuncture group, and 15% in the waiting list group. CONCLUSION: Acupuncture was no more effective than sham acupuncture in reducing migraine headaches although both interventions were more effective than a waiting list control.

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