

CAHE *Allied Health News in Review*

Can acupuncture help bring some relief from chemotherapy induced nausea?

Evidence Background

Acupuncture can help bring some relief from chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting (author: Dr Caroline Smith), *Reuters Health Information 1 May 2006*

Acupuncture and vomiting relief from chemotherapy
Electro-acupuncture can reduce the incidence of vomiting on the first day of chemotherapy was reported by Reuters Health Information in May 2006.

The origin of evidence: The report was based on a Cochrane systematic review undertaken by Jeanette Ezzo from James P. Swyers Enterprises, and colleagues.

The objectives of the review: The objectives were to undertake a systematic review of acupuncture-point stimulation for chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting in cancer patients. Secondary objectives were to assess the individual effectiveness of each modality (i.e. manual acupuncture, electro-acupuncture, non-invasive electro-stimulation, acupressure).

The nature of the evidence: Systematic review and meta-analysis.

Types of participants: Cancer patients receiving chemotherapy.

Types of intervention: Stimulation of acupuncture points by any method i.e. electro-acupuncture (involves application of electrical stimulation to the inserted needles), manual acupuncture (involves the insertion of needles into specific points around the body which does not involve the use of electrical stimulation), acupressure (application of pressure by fingertips to the acupuncture point), surface electrodes, or magnets with or without anti-emetic medications.

Types of outcome measures: Acute or delayed chemotherapy-induced nausea or vomiting, or both.

Key findings: Pooled data from nine trials (n=1214) found the incidence of acute vomiting was reduced in the acupuncture group 22% (155/714) compared to 31% (154/500) among controls; (RR = 0.82; 95% confidence interval 0.69 to 0.99; P = 0.04. The effect of acupuncture on acute nausea showed a trend favouring acupuncture-point stimulation but did not reach statistical significance (SMD = -0.11; 95% confidence interval -0.25 to 0.02; P = 0.10).

The authors looked at the method of stimulation on the acupuncture point and found the use of electro-acupuncture reduced first day vomiting. There was no data available on the effect of electro-acupuncture on nausea or longer term symptoms. Manual acupuncture did not reduce the symptoms of nausea or vomiting on the first day and the effect of acupuncture beyond the first day was not studied. Acupressure was effective for reducing first day nausea but did not reduce vomiting or delayed nausea.

Validity of the methodology and reliability of the conclusions: The limitations of the review are based on the limitations of the primary studies. The acupuncture studies did not use a placebo control. The use of an adequate sham control can introduce biases and influence accurate interpretation of the data.

Clinical implications from the review: The studies show that treatment is best given before symptoms start and that electro-acupuncture benefits last about eight hours and acupuncture about two hours. All subjects in this review were receiving conventional anti-emetic medication and therefore electro-acupuncture or acupuncture should be applied as an adjunct to standard care. The review highlights there are no studies evaluating acupuncture point stimulation with state-of-the-art anti-emetics and further research is needed.

A full version of the Cochrane systematic review can be found in Ezzo JM, Richardson MA, Vickers A, Allen C, Dibble SL, Issell BF, Lao L, Pearl M, Ramirez G, Roscoe JA, Shen J, Shivan JC, Streitberger K, Treish I, Zhang G. Acupuncture-point stimulation for chemotherapy-induced nausea or vomiting. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2006, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD002285. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD002285.pub2.

Additional reference: Reuters health Information can be found at:
<http://www.reutershealth.com/en/index.html>

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