Randomized effectiveness trial of a brief course of acupuncture for posttraumatic stress disorder.


The use of acupuncture is progressively becoming an acceptable alternative treatment for the symptoms often associated with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder - depression, stress, anxiety, and chronic pain. Acupuncture has been associated with the neural response in the limbic system, prefrontal cortex, and autonomic nervous system to inhibit some of these symptoms.

Engel et al., (2014) completed the first study evaluating the use of manual acupuncture in the treatment of PTSD for recently returned U.S. war veterans. In 2006-2007, a total of 55 active military personnel were randomized to 2 study groups. Twenty-seven participants received the usual PTSD care alone and 28 received a 4 week course of eight, 60 minute acupuncture treatments in addition to the usual PTSD care. Participants were followed over 12 weeks to assess the primary outcome of PTSD symptom improvement and the secondary outcomes of depression, pain, and mental and physical health functioning.

The addition of acupuncture to the usual PTSD treatment resulted in statistically significant improvements in both primary and secondary outcomes, i.e., reducing PTSD symptoms beyond that achieved through usual and customary care (PTSD Checklist $\Delta = 19.8 \pm 13.3$ vs. $9.7 \pm 12.9$, $P < 0.001$; Clinician-administered PTSD Scale $\Delta = 35.0 \pm 20.26$ vs. $10.9 \pm 20.8$, $P < 0.0001$).

Future application: It will be interesting to see if future studies yield similar results as to the effectiveness of manual acupuncture for 1) older veterans with chronic PTSD, 2) the general public with PTSD, and 3) with a lengthier follow-up period.

**TAKE-HOME MESSAGE**

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