

Acupuncture Eases Migraine Headache Pain

Acupuncture May Be Cost-Effective Option for Treating Chronic Headache

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March 15, 2004 -- Acupuncture may provide lasting relief from the pain of chronic headaches, such as migraines, according to a new study.

Researchers found that compared with standard medical care, acupuncture offers substantial benefits in preventing headaches and improving the quality of life for people who suffer from frequent headaches, especially migraines.

Acupuncture is commonly used to treat other types of chronic pain, but researchers say this is the first large-scale study to examine the effectiveness of acupuncture under real-life conditions. They say the results indicate that health insurance coverage of acupuncture services should be expanded to include the treatment of chronic headaches and migraine.

Pins and Needles Ease Migraine Pain

In the study, published in the March 15 issue of the *British Medical Journal*, researchers randomly divided 401 adults aged 18-65 years old with chronic headache (at least two headaches a month) -- into two treatment groups. Participants had a history of having mostly migraine headaches.

One group received up to 12 acupuncture sessions during a three-month period in addition to standard medical care, and the other group received standard care alone.

A year later, researchers found those who received acupuncture:

- Experienced 22 fewer days with headaches
- Used 15% less medication
- Made 25% fewer visits to their doctor
- Took 15% fewer days off sick from work than the control group

Researchers say one limitation of their study is that the control group did not receive a sham acupuncture intervention. Therefore, some of the benefits found among the acupuncture group may have not been caused by the actual treatment but because of the "placebo effect," which is based on the patient's expectations of benefit from treatment rather than the effectiveness of the treatment itself.

But researchers say previous placebo-controlled studies have already shown that acupuncture is superior to placebo in treating migraine.

In a related study published in the same journal, British researchers found that acupuncture improves the quality of life for people with chronic headaches at a small additional cost. They say the findings show that acupuncture is a relatively cost-effective headache therapy compared with other treatments covered by the National Health Service of the United Kingdom.