

Acupuncture Compared with Massage and “Sham” Laser Acupuncture for Treatment of Chronic Neck Pain

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In order to compare the efficacy of acupuncture and conventional massage for the treatment of chronic neck pain, a randomized, placebo controlled trial was done with 177 patients aged 18-85 years old. The patients were randomly given five treatments over three weeks with acupuncture (56), massage (60), or “sham” laser acupuncture (61).

One week after five treatments the acupuncture group showed a significantly greater improvement in motion related pain compared with massage (difference 24.22 (95% confidence interval 16.5 to 31.9), $P=0.0052$) but not compared with sham laser (17.28 (10.0 to 24.6), $P=0.327$). Differences between acupuncture and massage or sham laser were greater in the subgroup who had had pain for longer than five years ($n=75$) and in patients with myofascial pain syndrome ($n=129$). The acupuncture group had the best results in most secondary outcome measures. There were no differences in patients' beliefs in treatment.

The trial concluded that acupuncture is an effective short-term treatment for chronic neck pain, but there is not enough evidence for long-term relief after five treatments. Furthermore, compared with sham laser acupuncture and massage, needle acupuncture increases mobility and relieves pain related to motion in patients with chronic neck pain. Acupuncture was far more effective than massage, but differences were not always significant compared with sham laser acupuncture. Acupuncture was the best treatment for patients with the myofascial syndrome and those who had had pain for longer than five years.