

A randomized trial of acupuncture as an adjunctive therapy in osteoarthritis of the knee

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OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of acupuncture as an adjunctive therapy to standard care for the relief of pain and dysfunction in elderly patients with osteoarthritis (OA) of the knee.

METHODS: Seventy-three patients with symptomatic OA of the knee were randomly assigned to treatment (acupuncture) or standard care (control). Analysis was performed on last score carried forward to account for patients who dropped out before completion. Patients self-scored Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index (WOMAC) and Lequesne indices at baseline and at 4, 8 and 12 weeks. Patients in the control group were offered acupuncture treatment after 12 weeks. The data for these patients are pooled with those from the original acupuncture group for within-group analysis.

RESULTS: Patients randomized to acupuncture improved on both WOMAC and Lequesne indices compared to those who received standard treatment alone. Significant differences on total WOMAC Scale were seen at 4 and 8 weeks. There appears to be a slight decline in effect at 4 weeks after cessation of treatment (12 weeks after first treatment). No adverse effects of acupuncture were reported.

CONCLUSION: These data suggest that acupuncture is an effective and safe adjunctive therapy to conventional care for patients with OA of the knee.