

Medical Acupuncture

A Journal For Physicians By Physicians

Spring / Summer 1998 - Volume 10 / Number 1

"Aurum Nostrum Non Est Aurum Vulgi"

ACUPUNCTURE TREATMENT FOR MIGRAINE: CLINICAL OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Fifteen patients with migraine and chronic headache were treated with acupuncture and followed for up to five months. All 15 patients experienced improvement; 9 stopped medications after their headaches became very mild or disappeared. These encouraging results warrant more detailed studies.

KEYWORDS

Ear Acupuncture, Migraine

INTRODUCTION

Acupuncture has been reported to be beneficial in the treatment of individual cases of migraine and chronic headache (1, 2). Series of patients treated with acupuncture have not been reported. Since 1974, I have treated 262 migraine and chronic headache patients with acupuncture. Over 90% of these patients had favorable responses; more than half ceased to have headaches.

In order to assess this phenomenon analytically, I collected detailed information on 15 migraine and chronic headache patients. Treated with acupuncture, they were followed for a maximum of five months.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The 15 patients were female, between the ages of 20-80-years-old, and all suffering from headaches from 1-60 years. The headaches

occurred with a frequency ranging from daily to every-other-month; 8 experienced daily headaches. Medications taken by the patients prior to treatment included Fiorinal, Fiorinal with Codeine, Cafergot, Midrin, Excedrin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen, sumatriptan, sertraline, and amitriptyline.

All received acupuncture treatment at 4 ear points: Shen Men, Kidney, Sun, Subcortex (Figure 1).



Needles, 36-gauge, were inserted subcutaneously without penetrating the cartilage, and left in place 30 minutes without any manipulation or stimulation. The total number of treatments ranged from 2-11; the average number was 5. Frequency of treatment was 2-3 times a week, with the number of treatments determined by patient requirements. No complications or side effects were reported. Following treatment, patients were instructed to resume former medications for headache as necessary.

RESULTS

Results of treatment in the 15 patients are summarized in [Table 1](#). All 15 patients decreased the dosage of their medications; 9 of the 15 stopped medications altogether as they experienced minimal or no headache. This continued 3-5 months after cessation of treatments. It is noteworthy that of the 9 patients who became essentially headache-free, 1 had been taking 15 Fiorinal tablets daily for 9 years; 3 had been taking Tylenol or Cafergot on a regular basis for 15-30 years. Six patients experienced improvement, but did not become headache-free. All patients in the study decreased the quantity of headache medication they had been taking.

DISCUSSION

The basis for efficacy of acupuncture in the treatment of headache is obscure. Results are encouraging and suggest the need for larger, double-blinded clinical studies. An understanding of the underlying mechanisms responsible for the prolonged pain relief experienced by these aforementioned patients warrants further research and evaluation. Presently, the role of endorphins for the relief of migraine should also be further tested and considered (3).

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[Back to Top](#)

[AAMA](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Journal Index](#)