

Acupuncture for Treating Tension Headaches

The Evidence Grows Even Stronger.

By Editorial Staff

Tension headaches, which have been described as a dull pain, almost as if there was a tight band around the head, are one of the most common forms of headaches. Individual studies have shown promising results for the use of acupuncture to treat this type of headache, but a 2001 meta-analysis that combined the results from 26 individual studies, six of which focused on tension headache, found, "The quality and amount of evidence are not fully convincing." The authors of this study added, "There is an urgent need for well-planned, large-scale studies to assess the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of acupuncture under real-life conditions." Now, an updated meta-analysis has found that the evidence for acupuncture in treating tension headaches is indeed convincing.

In the January 2009 edition of the *Cochrane Library*, Linde and colleagues examined the results of 12 randomized trials, with a total of 2,317 participants. They were looking to determine whether acupuncture is more effective than no treatment or just routine care; more effective than sham acupuncture treatment; and as effective as other interventions (physiotherapy, massage or relaxation) in reducing headache frequency.

In those studies that compared acupuncture treatment to no/routine care, 47 percent of patients receiving acupuncture reported a decrease in the number of headache days by at least 50 percent, compared to 16 percent of patients receiving either no or routine care. For those studies comparing true and sham acupuncture, 50 percent of patients receiving true acupuncture reported a decrease of the number of headache days by at least half, compared to 41 percent of patients receiving sham acupuncture.

The researchers concluded, "In the previous version of this review, evidence in support of acupuncture for tension-type headache was considered insufficient. Now, with six additional [tension headache] trials, the authors conclude that acupuncture could be a valuable nonpharmacological tool in patients with frequent

episodic or chronic tension-type headaches."



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