



CADTH Reference List

Acupuncture for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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Key Message

We found 1 systematic review about the clinical effectiveness of acupuncture for people with posttraumatic stress disorder.

Research Question

What is the clinical effectiveness of acupuncture for people with posttraumatic stress disorder?

Methods

Literature Search Methods

An information specialist conducted a literature search on key resources including MEDLINE, PsycInfo, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, the International HTA Database, the websites of Canadian and major international health technology agencies, as well as a focused internet search. The search approach was customized to retrieve a limited set of results, balancing comprehensiveness with relevancy. The search strategy comprised both controlled vocabulary, such as the National Library of Medicine's MeSH (Medical Subject Headings), and keywords. Search concepts were developed based on the elements of the research questions and selection criteria. The main search concepts were acupuncture and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The search was completed on May 12, 2023, and limited to English-language documents published since January 1, 2018. Internet links were provided, where available.

Selection Criteria and Summary Methods

One reviewer screened literature search results (titles and abstracts) and selected publications according to the inclusion criteria presented in [Table 1](#). Full texts of study publications were not reviewed. The Overall Summary of Findings was based on information available in the abstracts of selected publications.

Table 1: Selection Criteria

Criteria	Description
Population	People with posttraumatic stress disorder
Intervention	Acupuncture, including needle and electroacupuncture (as adjunctive or monotherapy)
Comparator	No treatment (e.g., waitlist, sham therapy), usual care (e.g., psychotherapy, pharmacotherapy)
Outcomes	Clinical benefits (e.g., psychological symptoms, function, quality of life, patient satisfaction) and harms (e.g., adverse events)
Study designs	Health technology assessments, systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials, nonrandomized studies

Results

We found 1 systematic review about the clinical effectiveness of acupuncture for people with PTSD.¹ We did not identify any relevant health technology assessments, randomized controlled trials, or nonrandomized studies.

Additional references of potential interest that did not meet the inclusion criteria are provided in [Appendix 1](#).

Overall Summary of Findings

The systematic review we identified found that acupuncture resulted in better improvement of PTSD symptoms in adults post intervention and at a longer follow up compared to comparators.¹ The systematic review did not identify a significant difference between acupuncture and comparators on sleep quality and symptoms of depression and anxiety.¹ Additionally, the study suggests little risk of serious adverse events with acupuncture.¹



References

Health Technology Assessments

No literature identified.

Systematic Reviews

1. Grant S, Colaiaco B, Motala A, Shanman R, Sorbero M, Hempel S. Acupuncture for the treatment of adults with posttraumatic stress disorder: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Trauma Dissociation*. Jan-Feb 2018; 19(1):39-58. [PubMed](#)

Randomized Controlled Trials

No literature identified.

Nonrandomized Studies

No literature identified.

Appendix 1: References of Potential Interest

Previous CADTH Reports

Post-traumatic stress disorder: summary of evidence of the clinical effectiveness of treatments. Ottawa (ON): CADTH; 2018: https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/2018_ptsd_summary_of_reports_e.pdf Accessed 2023 Jun 02.

Alternative practitioners and treatments for mental health conditions: clinical and cost-effectiveness and guidelines. (CADTH rapid response report: summary of abstracts). Ottawa (ON): CADTH; 2018: https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/htis/2018_RB1211%20Natural%20Products%20for%20Mental%20Health%20Final.pdf Accessed 2023 Jun 02.

Systematic Reviews

Unclear Comparator

Bisson JI, van Gelderen M, Roberts NP, Lewis C. Non-pharmacological and non-psychological approaches to the treatment of PTSD: results of a systematic review and meta-analyses. *Eur J Psychotraumatol*. Aug 24 2020; 11(1):1795361. [PubMed](#)

Kwon CY, Lee B, Kim SH. Effectiveness and safety of ear acupuncture for trauma-related mental disorders after large-scale disasters: A PRISMA-compliant systematic review. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. Feb 2020; 99(8):e19342. [PubMed](#)

Protocol

Ding N, Li L, Song K, Huang A, Zhang H. Efficacy and safety of acupuncture in treating post-traumatic stress disorder: A protocol for systematic review and meta-analysis. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. Jun 26 2020; 99(26):e20700. [PubMed](#)

Randomized Controlled Trials

Protocol – Acupuncture for Combat Related PTSD

Hollifield M, Hsiao AF, Carrick K, et al. Acupuncture for combat post-traumatic stress disorder: trial development and methodological approach for a randomized controlled clinical trial. *Trials*. Sep 06 2021; 22(1):594. [PubMed](#)

Alternative Population – Veterans with Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD

Huang W, Johnson TM, Kutner NG, et al. Acupuncture for treatment of persistent disturbed sleep: a randomized clinical trial in veterans with mild traumatic brain injury and posttraumatic stress disorder. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 12 11 2018; 80(1):11. [PubMed](#)

Nonrandomized Studies

Alternative Population – Soldiers with Chronic Pain and PTSD

Saadoun M, Bauer MR, Adams RS, Highland KB, Larson MJ. Opioid and nonpharmacologic treatments among soldiers with chronic pain and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Psychiatr Serv*. 03 01 2021; 72(3):264-272. [PubMed](#)

Case Reports

Assouline A, Mendelsohn A, Reshef A. Memory-directed acupuncture as a neuromodulatory treatment for PTSD: Theory, clinical model and case studies. *Transl Psychiatry*. 03 17 2022; 12(1):110. [PubMed](#)

Sharp SJ, Huynh MT, Filart R. Frequency-specific microcurrent as adjunctive therapy for three wounded warriors. *Med Acupunct*. Jun 01 2019; 31(3):189-192. [PubMed](#)

Before and After

Moiraghi C, Poli P, Piscitelli A. An Observational study on acupuncture for earthquake-related post-traumatic stress disorder: the experience of the Lombard Association of Medical Acupuncturists/Acupuncture in the World, in Amatrice, central Italy. *Med Acupunct*. Apr 01 2019; 31(2):116-122. [PubMed](#)

Review Articles

Lee E, Faber J, Bowles K. A review of trauma specific treatments (TSTs) for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). *Clin Soc Work J*. Jun 2022; 50(2):147-159.

Liu C, Beauchemin J, Wang X, Lee MY. Integrative Body-Mind-Spirit(I-BMS) interventions for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): A review of the outcome literature. *J Soc Serv Res*. Jul-Sep 2018; 44(4):482-493.

Piotrowski C. Acupuncture research: a bibliometric analysis of primary studies spanning 1998-2018. *N Am J Psychol*. Dec 2018; 20(3):553-562.

Additional References

Scoping Review Protocol – Acupuncture for Military Veterans with PTSD

Seung HB, Leem J, Kwak HY, Kwon CY, Kim SH. Acupuncture for military veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder and related symptoms after combat exposure: Protocol for a scoping review of clinical studies. *PLoS ONE* [Electronic Resource]. 2023; 18(4):e0273131. [PubMed](#)

Evidence Repository

Pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder: an update of the PTSD-repositoryevidence base. (Systematic review). Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2022: https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/related_files/pharma-nonpharma-ptsd-2022-update.pdf Accessed 2023 Jun 02.

Article

Strauss JL, Lang AJ, Schnurr PP. Complementary and integrative health (CIH) for PTSD. White River Junction, (VT): National Center for PTSD; 2023: https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/txessentials/complementary_alternative_for_ptsd.asp Accessed 2023 Jun 02.

Clinical Handbook

Elkins G, Roberts L, Stork S. Complementary and alternative therapies. Treating PTSD in military personnel: A clinical handbook, 2nd ed. 2019; ():214-233.