TITLE: Acupuncture for the Treatment of Urinary Incontinence in Adult Patients: Clinical Evidence and Guidelines

DATE: 17 August 2011

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the clinical effectiveness of acupuncture for the treatment of urinary incontinence in adult patients?

2. What are the evidence-based guidelines regarding the use of acupuncture for the treatment of urinary incontinence in adult patients?

KEY MESSAGE

Limited evidence suggests that acupuncture may be clinically effective in the treatment of urinary incontinence in adult patients. However, given the lower-quality evidence of published research, guidelines for the use of acupuncture for the treatment of urinary incontinence remain unclear.

METHODS

The summary of findings was prepared from the abstracts of the relevant information. Please note that data contained in abstracts may not always be an accurate reflection of the data contained within the full article.

A limited literature search was conducted on key resources including PubMed, The Cochrane Library (2011, Issue 7), University of York Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD) databases, Canadian and abbreviated list of major international health technology agencies, as well as a focused Internet search. No filters were applied to limit the retrieval by study type. Where possible, retrieval was limited to the human population. The search was also limited to English language documents published between January 1, 2001 and July 29, 2011. Internet links were provided, where available.
RESULTS

Rapid Response reports are organized so that the higher quality evidence is presented first. Therefore, health technology assessment reports, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses are presented first. These are followed by randomized controlled trials, non-randomized studies, and evidence-based guidelines.

One systematic review and three randomized controlled trials were identified regarding the clinical effectiveness of the use of acupuncture in the treatment of adults with urinary incontinence. The literature search also identified one evidence-based guideline for acupuncture treatment in adults with urinary incontinence. No relevant health-technology assessment reports, meta-analyses or non-randomized studies were identified. Additional articles that may be of interest can be found in the appendix.

OVERALL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The one systematic review identified from our literature search addressed the use of acupuncture to improve the quality of life, including urinary incontinence, of patients suffering from spinal cord injuries. Two RCTs in the review compared acupuncture treatment with placebo and found a reduction in the number of incontinent events. The authors, however, concluded that the studies were of a low quality and that further research was required in order to elucidate whether the reduction in incontinent episodes was a true effect of the acupuncture treatment.

Three RCTs were identified that addressed the use of acupuncture in the treatment of urinary incontinence. The first of the RCTs compared the use of hand acupuncture for the treatment of stress urinary incontinence with a sham-acupuncture placebo. Results showed a statistically significant reduction in the frequency of urinary incontinence events in the treatment group. Another RCT the acupuncture therapy treatment group experienced improved bladder capacity, urgency and frequency of incontinence and quality of life scores versus the control group. The final RCT studied urge and mixed incontinence to find that the acupuncture treatment group experienced a statistically significant reduction in the number of day-time accidents. This RCT was a pilot study, so the results must be interpreted with caution.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published guidelines for the management of urinary incontinence in women. The guidelines recognize acupuncture as an alternative or complementary therapy in the treatment of urinary incontinence. The authors included three RCTs and three case-series reports in the guidelines although they considered the evidence to be of poor quality. There remains a lack of consensus on the actual acupuncture points and the duration of the treatment to achieve optimal results. Further research is required to create an appropriate clinical guideline on the use of acupuncture in the treatment of urinary incontinence.
REFERENCES SUMMARIZED

Health Technology Assessments
No literature identified.

Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses


Randomized Controlled Trials


Non-Randomized Studies
No literature identified.

Guidelines and Recommendations


PREPARED BY:
Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health
Tel: 1-866-898-8439
www.cadth.ca
APPENDIX – FURTHER INFORMATION:

Review Articles


Randomized Controlled Trials (Laser Acupuncture Therapy)


Clinical Knowledge Summaries: