Acupuncture in chronic epicondylitis: a randomized controlled trial

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Abstract

Objective. To evaluate the clinical efficacy of acupuncture in the treatment of chronic lateral epicondylitis.

Methods. In a randomized, investigator- and patient-blinded, controlled clinical study, 23 patients were treated with real acupuncture and 22 patients received sham acupuncture. Patients each received 10 treatments, with two treatments per week. The primary outcome variables were maximal strength, pain intensity (verbal rating scale) and disability scale (Disabilities of the Arm, Shoulder and Hand questionnaire). Patients were examined at baseline (1 week before the start of treatment) and at follow-up 2 weeks and 2 months after the end of treatment.

Results. There was no significant difference between the groups at baseline for any outcome parameter. Two weeks and 2 months after the end of treatment, there were significant reductions in pain intensity and improvements in the function of the arm and in maximal strength in both treatment groups. At the 2-week follow-up these differences were significantly greater for all outcome parameters in the group treated with real acupuncture. At 2 months the function of the arm was still better in this group than in the sham acupuncture group; however, the differences in pain intensity and maximal strength between the groups were no longer significant.

Conclusion. In the treatment of chronic epicondylopathia lateralis humeri, acupuncture in which real acupuncture points were selected and stimulated was superior to non-specific acupuncture with respect to reduction in pain and improvement in the functioning of the arm. These changes are particularly marked at early follow-up.

KEY WORDS: Epicondylitis, Tennis elbow, Acupuncture, Placebo, Randomized controlled trial.