

Acupressure to reduce labor pain

Hjelmstedt A, Shenoy ST, Stener-Victorin E, Lekander M, Bhat M, Balakumaran L, Waldenström U. Acupressure to reduce labor pain. Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand. 2010 Nov;89(11):1453-9.

A randomized controlled trial within an Indian public hospital to evaluate the effect of acupressure on pain levels when administered during the active phase of labor with women having their first baby

Summary

213 women having their first baby were randomized to receive either

1. Acupressure at SP6 (Sanyinjiao) on both legs during contractions over a 30-minute period
2. Light touch at SP6 (Sanyinjiao) on both legs during the same period of time
3. Standard care

Their experience of labor pain was assessed by visual analog scale at baseline before treatment, immediately after treatment, and at 30, 60 and 120 minutes after treatment.

Treatment Methods

The study was conducted in a large public hospital in India where epidural analgesia is not an option in normal labor and where women cannot bring a companion. All women in the study had uncomplicated pregnancies and been transferred to the labor room with a cervical dilatation between 3 and 7 cm. The women in the acupuncture group were treated with acupressure at SP6 (Sanyinjiao) on both legs simultaneously during each contraction over a period of 30 minutes.

Conclusion

A reduction of in-labor pain was found in the acupressure group and was most noticeable immediately after treatment. Retrospectively (2–24 hours after birth), the women in the acupuncture group remembered having had less pain during labor and said they coped better with their labor pain compared with the standard care. Compared to the women in the touch group, those in the acupuncture group remembered having coped better with the pain. The authors concluded that acupressure seems to reduce pain during the active phase of labor in women having their first baby and that that acupressure may be most effective during the initial phase of labor.

Clinical Perspective

This study reinforces a previous study that also found the use of acupressure on SP 6 (Sanyinjiao) reduced pain for women during active labour. While it is positive that

these studies are exploring the use of acupressure as pain relief for women, it is very disheartening that they focus only on the use of a specific point. Clinical experience suggests that there are a variety of acupressure points that a woman may find useful. The reality of following up hundreds of women from clinical practice, after having taught them nine acupressure to use, has been that very few that found SP6 (Sanyinjiao) the most useful point for pain relief. It may be that there are greater benefits than those found in the study through letting women and their support people select the acupuncture points they find most suitable for the different stages of labour.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20822474>