

Acupuncture and morning sickness

Smith et al in 2002 published two articles from their research on nausea and vomiting in pregnancy. The first looked at the effectiveness of acupuncture [\[5\]](#) and the second at the safety of acupuncture treatment in early pregnancy [\[6\]](#).

Summary

The objective was to compare; traditional acupuncture treatment, acupuncture at Neiguan P-6 only, sham acupuncture and no acupuncture treatment for nausea and vomiting. 593 women who were less than 14 weeks pregnant were randomised into 4 groups and received treatment weekly.

The acupuncture group, in which points were chosen according to a traditional acupuncture diagnosis, received two 20 minute acupuncture treatments in the first week followed by one weekly treatment for the next four weeks. The sham acupuncture group were needled at points close to but not on acupuncture points. Both the acupuncture group and the sham acupuncture group received their treatment from the same acupuncturist.

The outcomes of treatment were measured in terms of nausea, dry retching, vomiting and health status.

When compared to the women who received no treatment; the traditional acupuncture group reported less nausea throughout the study and less dry retching from the second week. The Neiguan P-6 acupuncture group reported less nausea from the second week and less dry retching from the third week. The sham acupuncture group reported less nausea and dry retching from the third week.

So while all three acupuncture groups reported improvement with nausea and dry retching, it was the traditional acupuncture group that had the fastest response. Patients receiving traditional acupuncture also reported improvement in five aspects of general health status (vitality, social function, physical function, mental health and emotional role function) compared to improvement in two aspects with the Neiguan P-6 and Sham acupuncture groups. In the no treatment group there was improvement in only one aspect.

Although there were no differences in vomiting found in any of the treatment groups the authors speculated that more frequent treatments might have produced greater benefits.

In assessing the safety of acupuncture in early pregnancy data was collected on perinatal outcome, congenital abnormalities, pregnancy complications and the newborn. No differences were found between study groups in the incidence of these outcomes suggesting that there are no serious adverse effects from the use of acupuncture treatment in early pregnancy.

Conclusion

Acupuncture is a safe and effective treatment for women who experience nausea and dry retching in early pregnancy.