

Acupuncture: Efficacy for Hot Flashes

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Background: Hot flashes are a significant problem in menopausal women and substantially affect quality of life. The world of estrogen replacement therapy has been thrown into turmoil with the recent results of the Women's Health Initiative trial report. Pursuant to a growing interest in the use of alternative therapies to alleviate menopausal symptoms and a few pilot trials that suggested that acupuncture could modestly alleviate hot flashes, a prospective, randomized, single-blinded sham controlled clinical trial was conducted in women experiencing hot flashes.

Methods: Participants, after being randomized to medical versus sham acupuncture received bi-weekly treatments for 5 weeks, after a baseline assessment week. They were then followed for an additional 7 weeks. Participants completed daily hot flash questionnaires, which formed the basis for analysis.

Results: 103 participants were randomized to medical or sham acupuncture. At week six the percent of residual hot flashes was 61% in the sham group and 62% in the medical acupuncture group and at week 12 the percent of residual hot flashes was 60% in the sham group and 71% in the medical acupuncture group. Participants reported no adverse effects related to the treatments.

Interpretation: The results of this study failed to suggest that the utilized medical acupuncture was any more effective for reducing hot flashes than was the chosen sham acupuncture. This is the first randomized sham-controlled trial completed in the United States evaluating the efficacy of acupuncture in hot flashes.