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Bothered by Hot Flashes? Acupuncture Might be the Answer

New meta-analysis shows benefits of ancient Chinese method on today's menopausal hot flashes

CLEVELAND, Ohio (July 14, 2014)—In the 2,500+ years that have passed since acupuncture was first used by the ancient Chinese, it has been used to treat a number of physical, mental and emotional conditions including nausea and vomiting, stroke rehabilitation, headaches, menstrual cramps, asthma, carpal tunnel, fibromyalgia and osteoarthritis, to name just a few. Now, a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials which is being published this month in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS), indicates that acupuncture can affect the severity and frequency of hot flashes for women in natural menopause.

An extensive search of previous studies evaluating the effectiveness of acupuncture uncovered 104 relevant studies, of which 12 studies with 869 participants met the specified inclusion criteria to be included in this current study. While the studies provided inconsistent findings on the effects of acupuncture on other menopause-related symptoms such as sleep problems, mood disturbances and sexual problems, they did conclude that acupuncture positively impacted both the frequency and severity of hot flashes.

Women experiencing natural menopause and aged between 40 and 60 years were included in the analysis, which evaluated the effects of various forms of acupuncture, including traditional Chinese medicine acupuncture (TCMA), acupressure, electroacupuncture, laser acupuncture and ear acupuncture.

Interestingly, neither the effect on hot flash frequency or severity appeared to be linked to the number of treatment doses, number of sessions or duration of treatment. However, the findings showed that sham acupuncture could induce a treatment effect comparable with that of true acupuncture for the reduction of hot flash frequency. The effects on hot flashes were shown to be maintained for as long as three months.

Although the study stopped short of explaining the exact mechanism underlying the effects of acupuncture on hot flashes, a theory was proposed to suggest that acupuncture caused a reduction in the concentration of β -endorphin in the hypothalamus, resulting from low concentrations of estrogen. These lower levels could trigger the release of CGRP, which affects thermoregulation.

“More than anything, this review indicates that there is still much to be learned relative to the causes and treatments of menopausal hot flashes,” says NAMS executive director Margery Gass, MD. “The review suggests that acupuncture may be an effective alternative for reducing hot flashes, especially for those women seeking non- pharmacologic therapies.”

A recent review indicated that approximately half of women experiencing menopause-associated symptoms use complementary and alternative medicine therapy, instead of pharmacologic therapies, for managing their menopausal symptoms.

The article, “Effects of acupuncture on menopause-related symptoms and quality of life in women on natural menopause: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials”, will be published in the February 2015 print edition of *Menopause*. The meta-analysis was supported by grants from the Ministry of Science and Technology of Taiwan.

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Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America’s leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.