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Acupuncture Good for Fibromyalgia?

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June 16, 2006 -- Researchers estimate that the majority of fibromyalgia patients try alternative treatments to relieve their symptoms. The ancient Chinese needle practice, acupuncture, might be one that can help.

A study published in the June edition of the *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* shows acupuncture can relieve fatigue and anxiety in fibromyalgia patients for up to seven months after the treatment. This study was also presented last year at the 11th World Congress on Pain.

David P. Martin, MD, PhD, and Mayo Clinic colleagues tested 50 fibromyalgia patients; half were treated with acupuncture, half got fake treatments. Neither group knew which treatment it was receiving.

The patients got six treatments over a two- to three-week period. They were questioned about their symptoms immediately after treatment, one month later, then again seven months later.

Based on their answers to the Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire, a standard tool in fibromyalgia treatment, the "true" acupuncture patients had less fatigue and fewer anxiety symptoms one month after treatment than the "fake" acupuncture group.

The questionnaire also asks about physical impairment, pain, stiffness, depression, and how well someone rests or feels. For these, there were no differences reported by the two groups.

Researchers also used a separate pain questionnaire that showed no significant differences.

Earlier Fibromyalgia Study

An earlier study -- reported in the July 5, 2006 issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine* -- also showed acupuncture gave no significant pain relief to fibromyalgia patients.

In the current report, Martin and colleagues say they believe their study was more controlled because it tested more severely affected patients from the same fibromyalgia treatment site, and used just two acupuncturists.

However, the researchers say their results "may represent a minimum effectiveness of acupuncture" and more study is needed.

SOURCE: Martin, D. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, June 2006; vol 81: pp 749-757.

