



CANCER CARE

## Taking the Pain Out of Cancer With Acupuncture

Editorial Staff

Cancer pain can be debilitating, whether it's pain caused by the disease itself or pain related to treatment. Fortunately, research suggests acupuncture can serve as a viable, nondrug therapy to combat cancer pain, giving patients already in great physical and emotional distress much-needed relief.

An important systematic review and meta-analysis [just published](#) in *JAMA Oncology* suggests acupuncture and/or acupressure is effective for reducing cancer pain. Researchers examined randomized clinical trials that compared acupuncture and acupressure with a sham control, analgesic therapy or usual care for managing cancer pain.

Overall, 17 RCTs (1,111 total patients) were included in the systematic review, and 14 RCTs (920 total patients) in the meta-analysis. The primary outcome was pain intensity measured by the Brief Pain Inventory, Numerical Rating Scale, Visual Analog Scale, or Verbal Rating Scale, with findings summarized as follows:



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"Seven sham-controlled RCTs (35%) were notable for their high quality, being judged to have a low risk of bias for all of their domains, and showed that real (compared with sham) acupuncture was associated with reduced pain intensity."

- "A favorable association was also seen when acupuncture and acupressure were combined with analgesic therapy in 6 RCTs for reducing pain intensity. ... and in 2 RCTs for reducing opioid dose."

These findings are significant because, as the authors state, more than 70 percent of cancer patients experience pain, but pain is inadequately controlled in nearly 50 percent of cases; and also because "addiction to analgesics and the adverse effects of pharmacological interventions pose critical challenges to pain management."

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