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Original Research | 3 November 2015

Alexander Technique Lessons or Acupuncture Sessions for Persons With Chronic Neck Pain: A Randomized Trial

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Ann Intern Med. 2015;163(9):653-662. doi:10.7326/M15-0667

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Comments (4)

This article has been corrected. The original version (PDF) is appended to this article as a Supplement.

Background: Management of chronic neck pain may benefit from additional active self-care-oriented approaches.

Objective: To evaluate clinical effectiveness of Alexander Technique lessons or acupuncture versus usual care for persons with chronic, nonspecific neck pain.

Design: Three-group randomized, controlled trial. (Current Controlled Trials: ISRCTN15186354)


Setting: U.K. primary care.

Participants: Persons with neck pain lasting at least 3 months, a score of at least 28% on the Northwick Park Questionnaire (NPQ) for neck pain and associated disability, and no serious underlying pathology.

Intervention: 12 acupuncture sessions or 20 one-to-one Alexander lessons (both 600 minutes total) plus usual care versus usual care alone.

Measurements: NPQ score (primary outcome) at 0, 3, 6, and 12 months (primary end point) and Chronic Pain Self-Efficacy Scale score, quality of life, and adverse events (secondary outcomes).

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Results: 517 patients were recruited, and the median duration of neck pain was 6 years. Mean attendance was 10 acupuncture sessions and 14 Alexander lessons. Between-group reductions in NPQ score at 12 months versus usual care were 3.92 percentage points for acupuncture (95% CI, 0.97 to 6.87 percentage points) ($P = 0.009$) and 3.79 percentage points for Alexander lessons (CI, 0.91 to 6.66 percentage points) ($P = 0.010$). The 12-month reductions in NPQ score from baseline were 32% for acupuncture and 31% for Alexander lessons. Participant self-efficacy improved for both interventions versus usual care at 6 months ($P < 0.001$) and was significantly associated ($P < 0.001$) with 12-month NPQ score reductions (acupuncture, 3.34 percentage points [CI, 2.31 to 4.38 percentage points]; Alexander lessons, 3.33 percentage points [CI, 2.22 to 4.44 percentage points]). No reported serious adverse events were considered probably or definitely related to either intervention.

Limitation: Practitioners belonged to the 2 main U.K.-based professional associations, which may limit generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion: Acupuncture sessions and Alexander Technique lessons both led to significant reductions in neck pain and associated disability compared with usual care at 12 months. Enhanced self-efficacy may partially explain why longer-term benefits were sustained.

Primary Funding Source: Arthritis Research UK.

Topics

acupuncture therapy discipline ; acupuncture procedure ; alexander technique ; neck pain, chronic ; neck pain

Journal Club

In chronic nonspecific neck pain, adding Alexander Technique lessons or acupuncture to usual care improved pain

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