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Acupuncture and Postoperative Pain Reduction

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Abstract

Purpose of review: Acupuncture is an analgesic technique that has long been utilized in Eastern medicine. In recent times, various acupuncture techniques have been used in integrated pain management approaches in Western medicine. It has even been adopted as an analgesic method in surgical patients. Currently, no review exists regarding various acupuncture techniques used in perioperative pain management and data describing the utility of these techniques. This paper synthesizes the latest literature regarding the role of acupuncture in perioperative pain management. The authors sought to describe various acupuncture modalities used to help manage surgical pain and synthesize the current body of literature to help readers make informed judgements on the topic.

Recent findings: Patients undergoing abdominal, spine/neuro, and gynecologic pelvic surgery generally benefit from acupuncture. Out of the various acupuncture techniques, electroacupuncture, transcutaneous electric acupoint stimulation, and traditional total body acupuncture seem to be most promising as adjuncts to multimodal perioperative analgesia. Benefits include improved analgesia and/or reduced narcotic requirements, decrease in PONV, and shorter time to return of bowel function. Acupuncture is a low-risk method that has the potential to enhance perioperative analgesia, decrease opioid requirement, and reduce unwanted side effects of anesthesia, surgery, and opioid administration such as nausea/vomiting. Given the variety of patient populations, various acupuncture techniques, and small patient populations for most current studies; it remains difficult to determine which acupuncture method would most benefit specific patients. Future studies with more robust sample sizes and prospective comparison on acupuncture technique would help better characterize acupuncture's role in perioperative pain management.

Keywords: Acupressure; Electroacupuncture; Moxibustion; Perioperative acupuncture; Perioperative analgesia; Perioperative pain; Transcutaneous electric acupoint stimulation.

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