

Acupuncture and Alexander Technique ease chronic neck pain better than usual care

2 November 2015

A large scale investigation by researchers at the University of York found that the use of Alexander Technique or acupuncture can significantly relieve chronic neck pain.

Chronic neck pain is a difficult condition to treat, and previous research shows that single interventions generally do not provide long term benefits. After evaluating the benefits of Alexander Technique or [acupuncture](#), the researchers from the Department of Health Sciences at York concluded that both interventions reduced pain and associated disability over a 12 month period when compared with usual care alone.

The study, published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, recruited 517 patients from GP practices in Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield and York. Participants were randomly placed in three groups: one group was offered up to 20 half-hour lessons with teachers from the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique plus usual care; another received up to 12 sessions of 50 minutes of acupuncture based on traditional Chinese medical theory with practitioners of the British Acupuncture Council plus usual care; and the third and final group received usual care alone. The interventions were delivered within the first four to five months. In all three groups, usual care over the 12 months included prescribed medications and visits to GPs, physiotherapists and other healthcare professionals.

The research showed that at 12 months, pain was reduced by 32 per cent for those receiving acupuncture and 31 per cent for those undertaking Alexander Technique lessons, where 25 per cent is a clinically relevant reduction. When comparing Alexander lessons or acupuncture with usual care alone, these reductions were found to be statistically significant. Moreover, patients in these two groups were found to be better able to cope or reduce their pain levels without resorting to medication.

Dr Hugh MacPherson, a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Health Sciences at York, said: "Our key finding is that there are significant reductions in [neck pain](#) associated with Alexander Technique lessons and acupuncture at 12 months. This is an important finding because for the first time we now have clear evidence that these two interventions provide longer-term benefits for [chronic neck pain](#)."

More information: The paper 'Alexander Technique Lessons or Acupuncture Sessions (ATLAS) for Persons With Chronic Neck Pain: A Randomized Trial' by MacPherson H, Tilbrook H, Richmond S, Woodman J, Ballard K, Atkin K, Bland M, Eldred J, Essex H, Hewitt C, Hopton A, Keding A, Lansdown H, Parrott S, Torgerson D, Wenham A, Watt I. is published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 2015; 163:249. [DOI: 10.7326/M15-0667](https://doi.org/10.7326/M15-0667)

Provided by University of York

APA citation: Acupuncture and Alexander Technique ease chronic neck pain better than usual care (2015, November 2) retrieved 25 July 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-11-trial-reveals-evidence-long-term-benefits.html>

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