

Does Combining Acupuncture with Conventional Treatment Offer Better Outcomes for Atrial Fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a common arrhythmia, in which the irregular heart rhythm originates in the atria, which are the upper chambers of the heart. During AF, the atria of the heart contract at an abnormally high rate. In response, the lower chambers of the heart, the ventricles, begin to contract faster as well, to try to keep up with the atria. AF is associated with many serious complications, such as the risk of ischemic stroke, and is typically treated with drugs or an invasive surgical procedure called catheter ablation. But these treatments have limited efficacy.

In traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture is one of the most widely used treatments for arrhythmias. We analyzed data from randomized controlled trials published between January 2000 and November 2023, using eight major research databases to ensure a comprehensive review of the available evidence.

We found a total of 15 research studies, which involved 1960 patients. Our meta-analysis revealed that acupuncture therapy could increase the cardioversion rate of the sinus rhythms of patients with AF. Acupuncture in combination with other conventional treatments was also more helpful in reducing ventricular rate in patients with AF than conventional treatments alone. Moreover, we found that patients treated with acupuncture along with conventional treatments exhibited shorter cardioversion times than patients treated with only traditional therapies. The recurrence rate of AF was additionally lower after treatment with acupuncture. Finally, we found that the clinical effectiveness of acupuncture along with drugs was higher than treatment with drugs alone. Significantly, there were no adverse reactions, such as hematomas, infections, or hemorrhages, associated with acupuncture treatment.

The findings of our study indicate that acupuncture can be used as an adjuvant or alternative treatment for AF. Our findings can also help identify more effective treatment strategies for AF, and can help inform clinical practice in the future.

Our review offers an advantage over other reviews because we limited out analyses to randomized controlled trials. However, since there are only a few studies conducted on this subject, the findings may not be generalizable. Further rigorous, long-term, large-scale, multicenter double-blind randomized controlled trials are required to validate the effectiveness of acupuncture assisted treatment of AF.

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