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Alternation of topical heat and cold at acupuncture point as therapy for chronic low back pain: A randomized, double-blind and controlled clinical trial

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Purpose: To evaluate the efficacy and safety of contrast therapy alternating topical heat and cold at acupuncture point in providing relief from chronic and function-limiting low back pain.

Relevance: Contrast therapy can reduce low back pain and improve functions of lumbar spine.

Participants: Enrolled patients were 20-75 years-old and suffered from LBP. All patients had LBP for more than 3 months, pain intensity more than 40 mm on the 100-mm visual analogue scale (VAS) and were able to understand the study protocol and provide written informed consent. Patients with unstable medical illnesses (example cancer, infection), psychiatric disease, previous surgery or trauma within 6 months of study onset were excluded. Patients were also excluded if contrast therapy was contraindicated (example those with skin disease, hypoesthesia or hypersensitivity to temperature) and or if they had previous medical care or physical therapy for LBP in the 4 weeks prior to study onset.

Methods: A total of 30 patients with chronic LBP were randomly assigned to a contrast therapy group (n=15) or a sham therapy group (n=15). Patients in each group received 10 treatments over 4 weeks. The contrast therapy was applied to an acupuncture point near the lumbar spine. The acupuncture point was 1 of 8 points commonly used for treatment of LBP. The primary outcome measure assessed at baseline and after each treatment was pain intensity on a 100-mm VAS. The secondary outcomes assessed at baseline and after 2 and 4 weeks of treatment were back-related dysfunction based on the Oswestry Disability Index, the Roland-Morris disability questionnaire, range of motion of lumbar spine based on the modified Schober test, finger-to-floor distance and finger-to-thigh distraction.

Results: The treatment group had significant improvements in pain, range of motion and functional status at 2 and 4 weeks relative to baseline. After 2 weeks, pain intensity and change of flexion range of motion was significantly better in the treatment group than in the control group ($p < 0.05$). At 4 weeks, the treatment group had significantly less pain, better range of motion and less back-related dysfunction than the control group ($p < 0.05$ for all).

Conclusions: Contrast therapy at acupuncture point in lumbar spine appears to be an effective and safe treatment for chronic LBP.

Biography

Young-doo Choi is licensed oriental medical doctor. He was resident in Dong-guk university Ilsan hospital in South Korea. He graduated from Dong-guk University in 2013, majoring in Oriental medicine.

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