



Meridian Healing

Bridging the physical with the mental, emotional and spiritual

Acupuncture During Pregnancy and Childbirth

by Sheryl Mika

Acupuncture has been used in China and other Asian countries for over 2500 years. Lately, it has also found a home in Western cultures. As a result of a report presented at the 85th Annual Meeting of the Radiological Society of North America in 1999, the FDA removed the acupuncture needle from its list of experimental devices and now considers it an accepted medical device. The report described studies in which healthy subjects, men and women between the ages of 25 and 54, received pain stimuli while they were undergoing magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the brain. The MRI pictures clearly showed a reduction in pain activity in most subjects with no side effects, indicating its clinical effectiveness and ending speculation of a "placebo effect". Acupuncture and Chinese medicine is a good way to resolve conditions without using drugs. Many consumers are concerned about the effects of drugs on their unborn child. There is no medicine in the needles, they are used simply for stimulation. It is based on the concept of balanced Qi (pronounced 'chee') or vital energy that flows throughout the body via certain pathways that are accessed by puncturing the skin with hair-thin needles at particular locations called acupuncture points. Acupuncture needles are so thin treatment is virtually painless. Even those with strong aversions to normal injections find acupuncture to be surprisingly comfortable. After insertion of one or more needles a client is often allowed to relax to soothing music for around 20 minutes, after which the needles are removed. The World Health Organization also recognizes that acupuncture is beneficial for many medical conditions. During the childbearing year, acupuncture has been shown to be beneficial for:

- **Reducing Hyperemesis - severe nausea and vomiting during pregnancy**

Carlsson, MD, Axemo, MD, Bodin, RN, Cartensen, MD, et. al. Manual Acupuncture Reduces Hyperemesis Gravidarum, A Placebo-Controlled, Randomized, Single-Blind, Crossover Study. Nov 1999.

- **Turning Breech Babies into a head-down position**

Cardini, F., & Wiexin, H. (1998) Moxibustion for correction of breech presentation. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 280 (18), 1580-1584

- **Reducing Pregnancy-Related Pelvic and low-back Pain**

Kvorning N, Holmberg C, Grenner L, et al. Acupuncture relieves pelvic and low-back pain in late pregnancy. *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica*. March 2004; 83(3):246-50.

- **Reducing Pain During Labor**

Nesheim, B I, Kinge, R, Berg, B, et al. Acupuncture during labor can reduce the use of meperidine (Demerol): a controlled clinical study. *The Clinical Journal of Pain* (2003;19:187-91)

Acupuncture Reduces Pain During Labor

Women who receive acupuncture during labor may experience less pain and require less analgesic medication, according to a new study in *The Clinical Journal of Pain* (2003;19:187-91). A large majority of women receiving acupuncture treatments during labor said they would want it again if they were to give birth again.

In the new study, 200 pregnant women were randomly assigned to receive acupuncture treatments during labor or no acupuncture. Specific acupuncture points were chosen by the midwife based on the woman's needs during labor. The needles were left in for about 20 minutes, but some women required a shorter or longer duration of treatment. Analgesics, including meperidine (Demerol®), nitrous oxide, epidural block (an injection of an anesthetic in the low back that numbs all of the nerves going to the uterus), and hot water bottles were used in both groups as needed for pain. The amount of analgesic medication used was recorded during labor and delivery.

In the group receiving acupuncture, 11% received meperidine during labor, compared with 37% of those who did not receive acupuncture. The percentage of women who required no analgesics at all in the acupuncture and placebo groups was 34% and 18%, respectively. When women who received acupuncture were questioned about whether they would want it if they gave birth again, more than 85% said they would.

The main reason for using analgesic medications during labor is to decrease or eliminate pain associated with uterine contractions. Meperidine is one of the most widely used medications for pain relief during labor but some studies suggest it is not very effective for pain control and may have adverse side effects on babies. An epidural block is effective but is not always appropriate for some stages of labor. Moreover, it is invasive and does not last long, which is problematic for women with prolonged labor. Acupuncture appears to be an effective method of pain control during labor and has no adverse side effects on the mother or baby.

MRI Shows That Acupuncture Treatments Reduce Pain

by ED Sussman

Dec. 1, 1999 (Chicago) -- Sticking an acupuncture needle into a point in the hand greatly diminishes the amount of brain activity associated with pain impulses, doctors report at the 85th Annual Meeting of the Radiological Society of North America.

In a series of experiments, researchers tell WebMD, the proper placement of the fine acupuncture needle in the area between the thumb and forefinger, called the Hegu point, allowed subjects to tolerate greater amounts of pain. And pictures of the brain before and after acupuncture treatment show dramatic decreases in brain activity -- up to 70%.

"It is important for Western medicine to recognize that these acupoints really mean something in regard to pain relief," says Huey-Jen Lee, MD, associate professor of clinical radiology and director of neuroradiology at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark. Acupoints are certain points on the body that, when pressed or punctured, have beneficial effects for certain ailments.

Lee reported on studies in which healthy subjects, men and women between the ages of 25 and 54, received pain stimuli while they were undergoing magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). The simultaneous procedures allowed doctors to view how and where brain activity occurred without acupuncture and during acupuncture treatments.

When the experiments were repeated after insertion of the acupuncture needle at the commonly used Hegu point, pain levels as seen with the MRI were decreased. Of 12 subjects who underwent the procedure, nine experienced pain relief.

"The data is pretty impressive," Elvira Lang, MD, associate professor of radiology and medicine at Harvard Medical School, Boston, tells WebMD. She says the MRI pictures clearly show a reduction in pain activation. "This shows there really is something going on here." Lee says that because the MRI definitively shows brain activity, it was likely the increased tolerance to pain was real and not just an artifact of treatment, known as a placebo effect.

"The brain actually shows differences," Lee says, "and that is convincing."
Wen-Ching Liu, PhD, a co-author of the study, says, "We found activity subsided in 60-70% of the entire brain."

The use of acupuncture for pain relief is gaining acceptance in the U.S., Lee says. "So many people with pain, whether from cancer, headache, or a chronic, unexplained condition, rely on medications, such as morphine, which can become addicting. Acupuncture has no side effects, and other studies have shown the pain relief it provides can last for months." Liu said there are more than 400 commonly used acupuncture points, or acupoints, on the body, although other practitioners of acupuncture will sometime cite more than 1,000 points.

Lee noted that the FDA has removed the acupuncture needle from its list of experimental devices and now considers it as an accepted medical device.

The study, Lee says, shows that "using a new technology can help us understand how this 2,500-year-old technique works. We still need more tests to understand this. Right now, we still really don't know how this works."

Vital Information:

- When patients are stimulated with acupuncture at a point between the thumb and forefinger, they are able to tolerate greater amounts of pain.
- Imaging of the brain shows a decrease in activity in the areas that regulate pain while acupuncture is performed.
- Acupuncture has no side effects, and the acupuncture needle is approved by the FDA as a medical device.