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Effect of acupressure and trigger points in treating headache: a randomized controlled trial.

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Abstract: The efficacy of acupressure in relieving pain has been documented; however, its effectiveness for chronic headache compared to the muscle relaxant medication has not yet been elucidated. To address this, a randomized, controlled clinical trial was conducted in a medical center in Southern Taiwan in 2003. Twenty-eight patients suffering chronic headache were randomly assigned to the acupressure group (n = 14) or the muscle relaxant medication group (n = 14). Outcome measures regarding self-appraised pain scores (measured on a visual analogue scale; VAS) and ratings of how headaches affected life quality were recorded at baseline, 1 month after treatment, and at a 6-month follow-up. Pain areas were recorded in order to establish trigger points. Results showed that mean scores on the VAS at post-treatment assessment were significantly lower in the acupressure group (32.9+/-26.0) than in the muscle relaxant medication group (55.7+/-28.7) (p = 0.047). The superiority of acupressure over muscle relaxant medication remained at 6-month follow-up assessments (p = 0.002). The quality of life ratings related to headache showed similar differences between the two groups in the post treatment and at six-month assessments. Trigger points BL2, GV20, GB20, TH21, and GB5 were used most commonly for etiological assessment. In conclusion, our study suggests that 1 month of acupressure treatment is more effective in reducing chronic headache than 1 month of muscle relaxant treatment, and that the effect remains 6 months after treatment. Trigger points help demonstrate the treatment technique recommended if a larger-scale study is conducted in the future.