The Evidence

Around 4% of adults experience headaches nearly every day. Non-drug based treatments such as acupuncture for frequent headaches may be appropriate because medical management alone is often ineffective (Coeytaux et al. 2005).

Physiotherapists with adequate training are able to treat headaches with acupuncture. The evidence, which includes randomised controlled trials (RCTs), supports the use of acupuncture for the treatment of various types of headache. The current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines (NICE 2012) support the use of acupuncture as a treatment for headaches.

Acupuncture should be considered as a treatment option for frequent or poorly controlled migraines, especially those experiencing side effects from medication. Research suggests that acupuncture is at least as effective as, or possibly more effective than, medication at treating migraines and has fewer side effects (Linde et al. 2009a).

A systematic review including 16 RCT’s concluded that there was a significant difference between acupuncture and medicine for neurovascular headaches, indicating acupuncture treatment had an obviously superior effect (Zhao et al. 2011).

Acupuncture could be a valuable non-medicine treatment for patients with frequent or chronic tension-type headache (Linde et al. 2009b).
REFERENCES


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