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Needling away pain of labor

Brooklyn hospital turns to acupuncture as homeopathic option to anesthetics for mothers-to-be

BY CURTIS L. TAYLOR

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Jeannie Torres says the pain was almost unbearable. After more than five hours in labor, she turned to the licensed acupuncturist at Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn for relief. Almost immediately, Torres says, she began to feel better after the tiny, hair-like needles were inserted into specific "acupoints" along her body. "I was more relaxed and calm," said Torres, 17, of Park Slope. "I would recommend it because you are not thinking about the contraction or the pain." Torres says when the acupuncturist returned about 30 minutes later to insert needles to speed delivery, she was fully dilated and delivered a healthy baby girl last week that she named Eliza.

Acupuncture is being combined with Western medicine during labor and delivery at the Brooklyn hospital in what officials there say could become a viable option to pain-relieving drugs. Preliminary research at the hospital suggests the therapy can significantly reduce pain, shorten labor and reduce the amount of anesthesia used in an epidural procedure, in which medication is administered directly into the spine. "Many people don't want medication during labor for a variety of reasons, and acupuncture provides a non-medication alternative for pain relief," said Dr. Iffath Hoskins, chairwoman of Lutheran's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

During labor and delivery, needles are commonly placed three inches above the ankle to increase dilation, between the fold of the thumb and index finger to stimulate contractions, and below the kneecap just outside the shin to boost the mother's energy level, according to licensed acupuncturist Claudia Citkovitz, co-investigator of the study. A small case-controlled pilot study at the hospital from February to September 2005 using five acupuncturists found that women who received the therapy had a lower rate of Cesareans, Citkovitz said. The study involved 149 cases: 45 acupuncture patients and 104 matched controls. Of the 45 acupuncture patients, three had Cesarean sections, while 25 of the controls had C-sections. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services aims to reduce the number of Cesareans among low-risk women by 2010.

Acupuncture has been a traditional part of Chinese medicine for more than 2,000 years. Although its effectiveness has been observed in other areas, including arthritis and back pain relief, the study, funded partially by a \$60,000 grant from the state, is believed the first in the United States to observe effects on labor, hospital officials said.

"When it really works, it has dramatic results, but it is not magical for everybody," Citkovitz said. "Western medicine has gotten phenomenally good at surgery techniques and medication for when things go wrong. Acupuncture is a holistic system that tries to build on what the body is already doing right."



BBC NEWS

Acupuncture 'pregnancy pain cure'

Acupuncture is effective at relieving pelvic pain during pregnancy, a study says.

Pelvic girdle pain is common among pregnant women with one in three affected suffering severe pain. Researchers found acupuncture was better at easing the pain than standard and specialized exercising. The team from Gothenburg's Institute for the Health of Women and Children said the medical profession should be more open to using acupuncture. Report co-author Helen Elden, a midwife at the institute, said: "The study shows that methods other than structured physiotherapy may be effective in treating pelvic girdle pain in pregnancy and that acupuncture represents an effective alternative." And she added: "A combination of several methods is probably even better."

It [acupuncture] is good because it does not involve any drugs, which women have to be careful about taking during pregnancy

Daniel Maxwell

The team studied the effect of three six-week treatment programs on 386 pregnant women suffering from pelvic girdle pain, which it is thought is caused by hormones affecting ligaments and muscles. One group were given a standard home exercise routine, a second received the exercise routine and acupuncture, while the third had a specialized exercise regime aimed at improving mobility and strength. Pain levels were recorded every morning and evening and assessments were done by an independent examiner. The women using acupuncture experienced the best results, followed by those who underwent the specialized exercise program. Daniel Maxwell, a member of the British Acupuncture Council, the regulatory body for acupuncturists, said the benefits of acupuncture for pregnant women was well known.

The use of acupuncture to treat pain during pregnancy certainly seems credible

Dr Graham Archard

vice-chair, Royal College of GPs

"Many pregnant women turn to acupuncture to relieve pain, especially pelvic pain. It is good because it does not involve any drugs, which women have to be careful about taking during pregnancy." But he said the medical profession needed to be more consistent in recommending acupuncture as a treatment. "Some GPs and midwives do refer people on for acupuncture, but some don't. It really does vary from area to area."

Dr Graham Archard, vice-chair of the Royal College of GPs, said 60% of family doctors use alternative therapies. "The use of acupuncture to treat pain during pregnancy certainly seems credible. Pregnant women should be avoiding drugs so acupuncture, which releases the body's natural painkillers, should be of benefit."

And Sue Macdonald, of the Royal College of Midwives, said: "Women should be offered acupuncture for this type of pain, but we must remember it might not be for everyone."

Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/4358509.stm>

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Acupuncture May Be Helpful for Pelvic Girdle Pain During Pregnancy

News Author: Laurie Barclay, MD
CME Author: Disirie Lie, MD, MEd

March 21, 2005 - Stabilizing exercises and acupuncture are helpful for pelvic girdle pain during pregnancy, according to the results of a randomized, single-blind trial published in the March 18 Online First edition of the British Medical Journal.

"Standard treatment may consist of a pelvic belt, a home exercise program, and patient education," write Helen Elden, from the Sahlgrenska Academy, East Hospital, in Gothenburg, Sweden, and colleagues. "Current treatment increasingly includes stabilizing exercises and acupuncture. However, insufficient evidence is available to give strong recommendations for or against any particular treatment modality for pelvic girdle pain."

At East Hospital and 27 maternity care centers in Sweden, 386 pregnant women with pelvic girdle pain were randomized to six weeks of standard treatment (n = 130), standard treatment plus acupuncture (n = 125), or standard treatment plus stabilizing exercises (n = 131). The primary outcome measure was pain on the visual analog scale (VAS), and the secondary outcome measure was assessment of severity of pelvic girdle pain by an independent examiner before and after treatment.

After treatment, the group receiving stabilizing exercise had less pain than the standard group in the morning (median difference, 9; 95% confidence interval [CI], 1.7 to 12.8; P = .0312) and in the evening (median difference, 13; 95% CI, 2.7 to 17.5; P = .0245).

The group receiving acupuncture had less pain in the evening than did the stabilizing exercise group (median difference, 14; 95% CI, 18.1 to 23.3; P = .0130). The acupuncture group also had less pain than the standard treatment group both in the morning (median difference, 12; 95% CI, 5.9 to 17.3; P < .001) and in the evening (median difference, 27; 95% CI, 13.3 to 29.5; P < .001). The independent examiner determined that reduction of pelvic girdle pain was greatest in the acupuncture group.

"Acupuncture and stabilizing exercises constitute efficient complements to standard treatment for the management of pelvic girdle pain during pregnancy," the authors write. "Acupuncture was superior to stabilizing exercises in this study.... Each method needs to be evaluated individually, however, before combinations can be recommended for future research, and only after that should recommendations for treatment be made."

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