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Acupuncture in the management of pain in labor.

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BACKGROUND: To assess if acupuncture could be a reasonable option for pain relief in labor and to look at possible effects of acupuncture on the progress of labor. **METHODS:** In a controlled, single blind study, 210 healthy parturients in spontaneous, active labor at term were randomly assigned to receive either real acupuncture or false acupuncture. Visual analog scale assessments were used to evaluate subjective effect on pain. The objective parameter of outcome was the need for analgesic medication in each group. **RESULTS:** There were significantly lower mean pain scores and significantly less need for pharmacological analgesia in the study group compared with the control group. The women given real acupuncture spent less time in active labor and needed less augmentation than the control group. **CONCLUSION:** The results indicate that acupuncture reduces the experience of pain in labor. A secondary outcome of acupuncture was a shorter delivery time, which mainly, if not exclusively, can be explained by the reduced need for epidural analgesia. Acupuncture may be useful for parturients who wish a nonpharmacological analgesia without side-effects. For others it could be the analgesic method of choice, with pharmacological analgesics as supplements.

PMID: 12366485 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

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