



Evaluating Acupuncture and Standard care for pregnant women with Back pain

Many pregnant women have back pain that impacts on their activities, work and sleep. Most are not referred by their midwives or GPs for treatment. When they do go to physiotherapy services, some women are offered one-off educational classes focusing on self-management advice, others are offered courses of individualised treatment. This is standard care at the moment.

Acupuncture is a promising treatment, which is used by some physiotherapists within the NHS. However there is little evidence to support whether this is a better than standard care.

A team at Keele University developed the EASE BACK study. This was a preliminary study to see if it was feasible to run a full trial that could establish if acupuncture is effective for pregnant women with back pain.

The first phase of the study involved interviews, a survey of almost 500 physiotherapists within the UK, followed by interviews with 17 pregnant women, 15 midwives and 21 physiotherapists.



MIDWIFE

"You can see how it's affecting their everyday lives, how much pain they're in, but you've got nothing to offer them."

PHYSIOTHERAPIST

"I think it's one of the few types of patients that we won't see more than once because you know that, physio wise, there is very little to offer."

PATIENT

"I think if people were telling me that it could help my back pain, I would pretty much do anything."

KEY FINDINGS

- Patients find it difficult to work and to function at home Pain also has an impact on relationships
- Patients often feel generally low
- There is a lack of effective treatments
- Midwives and physiotherapists often feel at a loss to know how to help
- Patients and midwives felt acupuncture was an acceptable treatment option

- Physiotherapists were concerned about the use of acupuncture in pregnancy, even though there is no evidence to suggest that it should not be used.

Back pain in pregnancy can severely affect women's abilities to carry on with daily life and their overall health.

NATIONAL SURVEY

The survey found a wide variety in treatments and advice.

Advice included:

- Postural exercises
- Pelvic floor exercises
- The use of support belts

Treatments offered included:

- Manual therapy
- Acupuncture
- A typical course of physiotherapy was 2-4 session over 6 weeks

The EASE Back feasibility trial of acupuncture in pregnancy

The trial took place at the Royal Stoke University Hospital and linked Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust antenatal and physiotherapy clinics.

The study was advertised in a number of ways, including broadcasts on Radio Stoke, bus signs and the Evening Sentinel.

Patients could take part in the trial if:

- They had pregnancy-related back pain
- Were under the care of a participating NHS site

- Were aged 18+ years
- Were between 13-31 weeks pregnant
- Never had acupuncture
- Able to read and communicate in English.

125 patients were randomly allocated to either acupuncture and usual care, or just usual care.

Women completed a questionnaire at the beginning of their treatment and 8 weeks later. They were asked about pain, use of medication, time off work and general health etc.



CONCLUSIONS

This was a small study to see if it is feasible to run a full trial to decide whether acupuncture is effective for pregnancy-related back pain. The study showed that:

- It is possible to recruit the number of women needed to take part in a full trial
- There were no safety issues associated with acupuncture
- In this preliminary study, results suggest there may be better outcomes for those receiving acupuncture
- Standard care with acupuncture may be more cost-effective than standard care alone.

A full size trial to test the effectiveness of acupuncture for pregnancy-related back pain is feasible.



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We would like to thank the women who shared their experiences, the midwives and physiotherapists who gave their time to advise and support the study, and the NHS Managers who allowed access to their staff teams.

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I feel that I have received excellent treatment during this study

- Patient

MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT KEELE.AC.UK/EASEBACK

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