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Acupuncture on allergic rhinitis - what is the evidence?

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Background and Aim: Allergic rhinitis is the most common cause of rhinitis and it's an extremely common condition, affecting approximately 20-30% of the european population. Although allergic rhinitis is not a life-threatening condition, complications can occur and the condition can significantly impair quality of life, wich leads to a number of indirect costs. Current treatment options aim to alleviate symptoms and acupuncture is growing in popularity and so its demand by patients. This study aimed to determine, in the light of current evidence, the clinical benefit of acupuncture in the treatment of allergic rhinitis.

Method: Searches were conducted in the Pubmed, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, National Guideline Clearinghouse. It was surveyed guidelines, systematic reviews (SR) and randomized controlled studies (RCTs), published in Portuguese and English, from January 2006 until December 2015, with the MeSH terms "Acupuncture therapy" and "Allergic rhinitis". It was used the "Strength of Recommendation Taxonomy" of the American Academy of Family to evaluate the evidence founded.

Results: After inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, two SR and three RCTs were selected. The SR with meta-analysis suggested that acupuncture could be a safe and valid treatment option for allergic rhinitis patients. The trials compared acupuncture to a sham or inactive acupuncture treatment and to western medicine. Symptoms improvement in the active acupuncture group were often seen without any additional adverse events. However, the trials were generally of poor quality.

Conclusions: Although acupuncture treatment appears to be safe and is associated with low costs, there is currently insufficient evidence on the clinical effectiveness to support or refute its use in patients with allergic rhinitis. The strength of recomendation for acupuncture as an option treatment in allergic rhinitis is B (consistent but lower quality clinical trials).