
A Comparison of Physical Therapy Modalities versus Acupuncture in the Treatment of Fibromyalgia Syndrome: A Pilot Study

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Setting the scene:

Physical therapy (PT) modalities are used in the treatment of fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS). Acupuncture is a treatment option often sought after by FMS patients. The aim of this study was to compare the effects of PT modalities with those of acupuncture on pain, daily function, and quality of life in FMS patients.

What did they do?

Forty-four female FMS patients between the ages of 18–70 years with manifestations of chronic widespread musculoskeletal pain symptoms, normal routine blood tests, and a desire to receive PT or acupuncture were included in the study. One group (n = 22) received 15 PT sessions. The other group (n = 22) received 10 sessions of formulated acupuncture PT modalities. A total of 15 sessions (five consecutive sessions per week lasting 1 h each) of hotpack therapy (heated to 71°C–74°C for 20 min), TENS (at a frequency of 100 Hz, intensity adjusted to the patient's tolerability for a total of 20 min), and ultrasound (1 MHz, 1.5 W/cm² for a total of 10 min) were applied to the tender points²⁷ of the neck and upper back seen in FMS patients; bilateral suboccipital muscle insertions, bilateral trapezius at the midpoint of the upper border, above the scapula spine near the medial border bilaterally, and paraspinous 3 cm lateral to the midline at the level of the midscapula bilaterally.²⁸ The acupuncture group received a total of 10 sessions, each lasting 20 min, once every 2 days over a 3-week period. Seventeen needle insertions took place per subject per session using the reinforcing method for a total of 20 min. On insertion of the acupuncture needle, de qi sensation was elicited in the patients.

Takeaway message:

The findings of this pilot study suggest that PT modalities and acupuncture can be used with clinical effectivity in the multimodal treatment of FMS. Even though one treatment method was not found to be superior to the other,