Adminstration of Acupressure for Relief of Low Back Pain

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Low back pain (LBP) is experienced at some point in life by approximately 80% of the population,1,2 with 70% of affected individuals improving or remaining stable after four years of treatment.3 Conventional treatment of LBP includes spinal manipulation, behavioral therapies, pharmaceutical interventions, and home exercise programs.2

The majority of LBP is chronic (80-90%), which is typically characterized by a nonspecific musculoskeletal origin and unremarkable diagnostic tests.2,4 Prolonged recovery and chronic pain often motivate patients to seek nontraditional treatments.5-8

The literature suggests that acupuncture and acupressure treatments are effective for reduction of LBP, but a debate persists concerning the physiologic basis for the reduction in pain.1-13 According to traditional Chinese medicine theory, back pain is caused by stagnation or an obstruction in the flow of “chi”—or vital energy—throughout the back region.3 Obstruction or stagnation in the channels where the chi flows is believed to lead to malnourishment in the area, thereby giving rise to pain.3 The goal of traditional Chinese medicine is to stimulate the blocked points of energy flow, restore the chi by removing obstructions, and improve circulation to the area. The use of acupressure as an adjunct modality early in treatment process appears to facilitate return to work.3

Evaluation and Treatment Options

Each LBP patient should receive a thorough examination to ensure that an acute injury is not overlooked and that appropriate treatment is administered. Although acupressure may alleviate pain caused by an acute injury (e.g., disk herniation, spondylolisthesis, fracture, etc.), other interventions may be necessary. Regardless of the primary cause of LBP, the primary indication for the application of acupressure is pain reduction.9-16 The proper administration of acupressure requires skill, so novice clinicians must practice to apply the correct amount of pressure to provide relief.16

Acupressure

Acupressure is effective for relief of pain, regardless of its cause, but it does not change the underlying condition that created the pain. This report will focus on three acupressure points for the management of low back pain:

- High Mountains (BL-60)
- Great Rushing (LV-3)
- San Jiau 3
- Back Pain Point (dorsum of hand)
- LV-3 (foot)

Acupressure should be administered to the identified points for one to two minutes to achieve pain relief.

Key Points

- The goal of acupressure treatment is to remove obstructions that block energy flow, which is believed to relieve pain by improving circulation and nutrition.
- High Mountains (BL-60), Great Rushing (LV-3), San Jiau 3, Back Pain Point (dorsum of hand), and LV-3 (foot) are specific acupressure points for the management of low back pain.
- Acupressure should be administered to the identified points for one to two minutes to achieve pain relief.
sure points that are effective for relief of LBP, whether the procedure is performed by an athletic trainer or therapist (AT) or self-administered by a patient. Acupressure points should not be confused with myofascial trigger points, which are focal areas of sensitivity in the fascia that are identified through AT/patient communication. Myofascial trigger points do not directly correspond to meridians.6,16

The technique used to administer acupressure is the same for each of the points that are specified. The AT or patient should maintain manual pressure on the acupressure point associated with the desired meridian. The AT may also massage in small circles or administer a pulsating pressure. The acupressure point should be massaged for one to two minutes or until the patient relates that pain relief has been achieved. Patients should be instructed to close their eyes and slow down breathing during the administration of acupressure.16

The specific acupressure points that are effective for LBP relief are BL-60 (ankle), LV-3 (foot), and LI-4 (hand).14 BL-60 (or “High Mountains”) is located on the outer ankle, between the Achilles tendon and the lateral malleolus (Figure 1).14 The AT or patient should press and hold this point or massage downward on the point, moving the fingers in the groove between the Achilles tendon and the lateral malleolus. Massage should be performed on both ankles for optimal pain relief.14

General pain relief can be accomplished by treating two areas: LV-3 (“Great Rushing”) on the foot (Figures 2 & 3) and LI-4 on the hand (Figure 4).14 Combined treatment of these two points is effective for relief of pain originating from areas other than the back, such as headache or neck pain. The “Great Rushing” point (LV-3) is located on the top of the foot (Figure 2). The point is easily located by running a finger between the first and second metatarsals, to the area near the junction of the first and second rays. The finger should slide into the interosseous membrane between the