**Could acupuncture stave off dementia? Needle treatment may help elderly people retain their memory**

* **Ancient treatment involves inserting thin needles into parts of the body**
* **If used for 2 months , 3 times a week, it improved scores on memory tests**
* **Treatment was particularly effective if used alongside dementia drugs**

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Acupuncture may help elderly people retain their memory, research suggests.

Chinese scientists found that the ancient treatment – which involves inserting thin needles in different parts of the body – might even stave off decline during the early stages of dementia.

The Wuhan University team found that if used for at least two months, three times a week, it improved scores in a number of cognition tests.

The treatment is particularly effective if used alongside dementia drugs, their findings suggest.

Scientists have long been divided about the benefits of acupuncture, a discipline which dates back 3,000 years.

Critics say its benefits have never been proven, and NHS watchdog NICE earlier this year removed the treatment from a list of recommended therapies for back pain.

But others say it is useful technique that should be utilised as much as possible, especially where no other effective treatments exist.

The researchers, whose work is published in the BMJ journal Acupuncture in Medicine, reviewed the findings of five previous studies involving 568 patients.

The trials all involved people with mild cognitive impairment, a condition in which memory is declining and which often leads to a diagnosis of dementia.

The team found that those in receipt of acupuncture fared better than those who received common dementia drug nimodopine alone.

They scored better scores on two established tests of cognition - an examination of mental state and a test of picture recognition.

A combination of acupuncture and nimodipine also significantly improved exam scores when compared to nimodipine alone.

The researchers concluded that acupuncture ‘has a significant positive effective on cognitive and memory function’.

But they admitted that far more research is needed.

‘There were several potential limitations of this review,’ they wrote.

‘Although one trial was published in English, all the random control trials were conducted in China, which might implicate publication bias.

‘Chinese patients may have a preference for acupuncture treatment over medical intervention, and the design of the included studies did not control for potential placebo effects.

‘Therefore, rigorous clinical studies in Western settings should be considered before extrapolating the results to other populations.’

British experts last night cast doubt on the findings.

Dr James Pickett, head of research at the Alzheimer’s Society, said: ‘The lack of strong and convincing evidence makes it difficult to reach any meaningful conclusions. On this basis, acupuncture is not the answer to preventing memory problems or dementia.’

Professor Edzard Ernst of the University of Exeter, added: ‘This is a perfect example of the “rubbish in, rubbish out” phenomenon which is well-known to authors of systematic reviews - if the primary studies are flawed, the review of such studies will be flawed as well.

‘It has been shown repeatedly that Chinese acupuncture trials almost never report negative results. This means that, in the hands of Chinese researchers, acupuncture works for everything. For anyone who is able to think critically, this means that their data have to be taken with more than just a pinch of salt.

‘In other words, the findings of this review are next to meaningless, in my view.’

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3724996/Could-acupuncture-stave-dementia-Needle-treatment-help-elderly-people-retain-memory.html#ixzz4NQetjf1G>   
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