

# Incorporating Music Therapy With Acupuncture in Managing Cancer Pain at an Acupuncture Practice

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**BACKGROUND:** Complementary and alternative medicine encompasses various nonpharmacologic interventions for managing pain, such as acupuncture and music therapy. Few studies have combined these two interventions in the management of cancer-related pain.

**OBJECTIVES:** The purpose of this evidence-based project was to compare acupuncture-only therapy versus dual therapy (acupuncture and music therapy) on pain intensity scores in patients with cancer.

**METHODS:** This evidence-based project included 102 participants at a private acupuncture practice. One group had acupuncture only for six weeks, and another had six weeks of acupuncture and music therapy. The Numeric Pain Rating Scale was used to assess pain before and after the interventions.

**FINDINGS:** Findings showed that both groups had clinically and statistically significant improvements in pain intensity scores. Although a significant difference was not noted between the two groups, acupuncture and music therapy were each found to be effective for managing cancer-related pain.

## KEYWORDS

acupuncture; cancer; cancer-related pain; complementary medicine; music therapy

## DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

10.1188/24.CJON.305-312

**PAIN AFFECTS MORE THAN 70% OF PATIENTS** with a cancer diagnosis, particularly those with advanced disease. It is considered to be one of the most distressing symptoms related to cancer (Russo & Sundaramurthi, 2019). Cancer pain may be related to tumor burden in addition to being a side effect related to chemotherapy, surgery, radiation therapy, or other forms of treatment (Russo & Sundaramurthi, 2019). Unmanaged pain is an ongoing issue for patients with a cancer diagnosis, and this problem has been amplified by the current opioid epidemic (Enzinger et al., 2021). Studies have illustrated that poor pain control is associated with decreased quality of life for patients (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

The mainstay of treatment for cancer-related pain is opioid medication, which has resulted in many challenges for patients (Fallon et al., 2018). Some of the major barriers to opioid-based cancer pain management are fear of drug dependence and addiction, as well as negative attitudes about opioid analgesia held by patients (Rafii et al., 2021). In addition, insurance companies have made it challenging to obtain opioid medications, and providers may lack the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to appropriately manage cancer-related pain (Rafii et al., 2021). Therefore, more innovative non-opioid measures are needed to effectively manage cancer-related pain.

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) presents a non-opioid approach to pain management. CAM includes practices like yoga, massage, tai chi, acupuncture, and music therapy (Deng, 2019). Acupuncture and music therapy have been used in the treatment of pain for centuries (Deng, 2019). This evidence-based project proposes that dual therapy incorporating music therapy and acupuncture may better improve patients' pain intensity scores compared to acupuncture-only sessions. This is based on evidence that acupuncture and music therapy can improve pain independently (Deng, 2019; Wang et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2015).

The gate control theory suggests that pain signals encounter gates, which allow or impede the transmission of pain signals (Melzack & Wall, 1965). The small fibers, which are the pain fibers, close when the sensation of pain decreases and open when pain is felt (Melzack & Wall, 1965). Factors that may diminish pain and close these gates include pain medications and CAM, which includes acupuncture and music therapy (Moayeddi & Davis, 2013). Because music therapy and acupuncture are known effective modulators in