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Effect of acupuncture and its neurophysiological mechanism in patients with chronic sciatica: Protocol for a randomized, patient-assessor blind, sham-controlled clinical trial**Koh-Woon Kim, Jae-Heung Cho, Eun-Mo Song, Woo-Chul Shin and Mi-Yeon Song***
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Sciatica is relatively frequent illness with a highest incidence of 40% and can easily become a chronic and relapsing symptom. Although numerous systematic reviews have compared various therapies for sciatica, the validity of their included studies is limited. Considering the shortcomings of conventional treatment options for sciatica, acupuncture could be a possible option. However, evidence supporting its efficacy and mechanism is lacking. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect and neurophysiological mechanism of acupuncture in patients with chronic sciatica. This ongoing study is a randomized, patient-assessor blind, 2-arm parallel non-penetrating sham-controlled clinical trial. Eligible participants, adults (19-70 years of age) with a clinical diagnosis of chronic sciatica blinded to the treatment received, will be randomly allocated into the real acupuncture treatment group (manual acupuncture plus electroacupuncture, n=34) or the sham acupuncture control group (sham acupuncture plus placebo electroacupuncture without electrical stimulation, n=34) and receive treatment 2 times a week for a total of 8 sessions over 4 weeks. Functional magnetic resonance imaging will be implemented at baseline and endpoint to investigate the mechanism of acupuncture. The primary outcome measure is VAS for bothersomeness. The secondary outcomes include VAS for pain intensity, Oswestry Disability Index, EuroQol 5-Dimension, Coping Strategy Questionnaire, Beck Depression Inventory, and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. Adverse events will be assessed at every visit. The results of this trial will provide important clinical evidence for the effect of acupuncture and demonstrate how acupuncture can be helpful for the treatment of chronic sciatica.

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