We conducted a structured literature review through PubMed and the University of Ottawa Library databases. The key words we used were "acupuncture" and "substance abuse". We used the "peer reviewed" filters on the Unichain filter and the "clinical trial" filter on the PubMed database.

Inclusion criteria: clinical trials looking at the effects of acupuncture on substance abuse.

Exclusion criteria: trials that lacked randomization or were not placebo-controlled, articles not published in English, studies that did not have withdrawal symptoms as an outcome measure. For the purpose of this study, the term "withdrawal" includes any adverse symptoms caused by cessation of substance use (These include symptoms such as cravings, sleep disturbance, anxiety, pain, depression). Due to the limited number of studies available, we did not use date published in the inclusion exclusion criteria. Jaded scores were used to assess the methodological quality of each study.

The nature of acupuncture as a Chinese medicine may prove to be inherently difficult to control methods and blinding that are characteristic of acupuncture treatments. Accuracy of results may be increased as potential identified biases may then be accounted for. The inclusion criteria may have been too stringent regarding the inclusion of only RCTs; there is likely quality information to be gained from both cohort and case-control studies. The nature of acupuncture as a Chinese medicine; therefore, there is likely a plethora of valuable research in other languages (in particular, Chinese) that were not accessed.

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Due to the low number of studies presenting statistically significant relationships between treatment exposure and outcome variables, combined with the inherent limitations of the studies, our results from this literature review would suggest that it is doubtful that acupuncture could be effectively utilized in the treatment and management of withdrawal symptoms in the SUD population. However, as the results were not overwhelmingly toward the null hypothesis, this would indicate that acupuncture may prove beneficial as an adjunct to current forms of withdrawal therapy. Further research is required to reach conclusiveness about acupuncture potential benefits in this regard.