



Acupuncture Canada – Recommendations for Skin Preparation

Best practice for skin preparation prior to insertion of an acupuncture needle is a controversial and not well-researched topic in the literature. Although many authors consider skin disinfection unnecessary, their research methodologies may be flawed, therefore calling into question the reliability of their results.

The best evidence to date is in support of having the patient's skin and the practitioner's hands clean prior to acupuncture treatment.

Options for skin preparation include Stanhexidine[®], which Acupuncture Canada recommends. We take this position recognizing that the incidence of infection following acupuncture is low. Skin cleansing with Stanhexidine in addition to following clean needle technique can potentially further reduce the risk of serious infections such as cellulitis. Stanhexidine[®] is the trade name for a preparation that is 2% chlorhexidine with 4% isopropyl alcohol. The company website is: www.omegalaboratory.com/index.php/download_file/view/1854/329/.

In addition to use of Stanhexidine[®], Acupuncture Canada advises that the practice of proper handwashing by the practitioner be followed. Soap and running water is most effective. An alcohol-based sanitizer (60% alcohol) may be used, however this is not effective if hands are visibly soiled.

Patient skin must also be clean. If signs of visible soiling are observed, washing the area with soap and water are recommended prior to application of Stanhexidine[®].

The site of needle injection should be swabbed with Stanhexidine[®] in an outward direction. One swab may be used for several sites, however a new swab should be used if it becomes soiled, dry or if used in areas of high bacterial count such as the axilla, groin or buttock.

From a medico-legal perspective, it may be difficult to defend a case of local infection when skin disinfection preparation is not carried out prior to acupuncture needling. We advise you to consider this when making clinical decisions regarding skin preparation. Health care regulators may have specific standards in place regarding skin preparation. Practitioners should consult with their regulators and be aware of and follow their guidelines. Acupuncture Canada's recommendations are not intended to replace the guidelines of regulators.

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