

Research on the use of acupuncture to prepare women for labour first appeared in 1974 with a study by Kubista and Kucera.[5] Their research concluded that acupuncture once a week from 37 weeks gestation using the acupuncture points Zusanli ST-36, Yanglingquan GB-34, Jiaoxin KID-8 and Shenmai BL-62 was successful in reducing the mean labour time of the women treated.

They calculated the labour time in two ways. The first was the mean time between a cervical dilation of 3-4 cm and delivery. In the acupuncture group this was 4 hours and 57 minutes compared to five hours and 54 minutes in the control group. The second was the mean subjective time of labour, taken from the onset of regular (10-15 minute) contractions until delivery.

The acupuncture group had a labour time of 6 hours and 36 minutes compared to eight hours and 2 minutes in the controls.

In 1998 Zeisler et al.[6] used the acupuncture points Baihui DU-20, Shenmen HE-7 and Neiguan P-6, treating from 36 weeks gestation.

This study concluded that acupuncture treatment had a positive effect on the duration of labour by shortening the first stage of labour, defined as the time between 3cm cervical dilation and complete dilation.

The acupuncture group had a median duration of 196 minutes compared to the control group time of 321 minutes.

In 2004 I was involved in an observational study looking at the effect of prebirth acupuncture together with Sue Lennox, a midwife[7].

169 women who received prebirth acupuncture were compared to local population rates for gestation at onset of labour, incidence of medical induction, length of labour, use of analgesia and type of delivery

In the acupuncture group there was an overall 35% reduction in the number of inductions (for women having their first baby this was a 43% reduction), 31% reduction in the epidural rate.

When comparing midwifery only care there was a 32% reduction in emergency caesarean delivery and a 9% increase in normal vaginal births.

Our conclusion was that prebirth acupuncture appeared to provide some promising therapeutic benefits in assisting women to have normal vaginal births and that a further randomized controlled study is warranted.