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Radon therapy for the treatment of rheumatic diseases-review and meta-analysis of controlled clinical trials

Falkenbach A , Kovacs J, Franke A, Jorgens K, Ammer K

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Gasteiner Heilstollen Hospital, 5645, Bad Gastein-Bockstein, Austria.

OBJECTIVE: The aim of this study was to analyze the effect of radon therapy on pain in rheumatic diseases.

METHODS: MEDLINE and MedKur databases were searched for the terms radon plus therapy, rheum, arthritis, and osteo. Radon therapy centers and experts in the field were contacted, proceedings hand-searched, and bibliographies checked for references of potential importance. Included were all prospective randomized controlled clinical trials that compared clinical effects of radon therapy with other interventions in patients with rheumatic diseases and studied pain intensity. Information concerning patients, interventions, results, and methodology were extracted in a standardized manner by all authors independently and summarized descriptively. Reports on pain reduction were pooled for meta-analysis.

RESULTS: Five clinical trials with a total of 338 patients and comparing the effect on pain of radon baths (three trials) or radon speleotherapy (two trials) with control intervention in degenerative spinal disease (two trials), rheumatoid arthritis (one trial) and ankylosing spondylitis (two trials) met the inclusion criteria. In meta-analysis, the pooled data showed no difference immediately after treatment ($P=0.13$) but significantly better pain reduction in the radon group than the control group at 3 months ($P=0.02$) and 6 months ($P=0.002$) after treatment.

CONCLUSIONS: The existing trials suggest a positive effect of radon therapy on pain in rheumatic diseases.

With respect to the potential clinical effect and given the increasing public interest in radon therapy, there is an urgent need for further randomized controlled clinical investigations with long-term follow-up.