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Virtual Reality as a Clinical Tool for Pain Management

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Abstract

Purpose of Review

To evaluate the use of virtual reality (VR) therapies as a clinical tool for the management of acute and chronic pain.

Recent Findings

Recent articles support the hypothesis that VR therapies can effectively distract patients who suffer from chronic pain and from acute pain stimulated in trials. Clinical studies yield promising results in the application of VR therapies to a variety of acute and chronic pain conditions, including fibromyalgia, phantom limb pain, and regional specific pain from past injuries and illnesses.

Summary

Current management techniques for acute and chronic pain, such as opioids and physical therapy, are often incomplete or ineffective. VR trials demonstrate a potential to redefine the approach to treating acute and chronic pain in the clinical setting. Patient immersion in interactive virtual reality provides distraction from painful stimuli and can decrease an individual's perception of the pain. In this review, we discuss the use of VR to provide patient distraction from acute pain induced from electrical, thermal, and pressure conditions. We also discuss the application of VR technologies to treat various chronic pain conditions in both outpatient and inpatient settings.

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