

Table 1 Time points of treatment assessment



Time point	Screening		Baseline	Treatment								Follow-up					
	Week-2	Week-1	Week 0	Week 1	After first treatment	Week2	Week3	Week4	Week5	Week6	Week8	Week10	Week12	Week14	Week16	Week18	
Screening and enrolment																	
Eligibility screen	×	×															
Informed consent	×	×															
Randomization			×														
Interventions																	
Sensitive acupoints																	
Sham acupuncture																	
Assessments																	
The response rate				×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Abdominal pain				×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Bloating				×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Loose stool days				×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
IBS-AR				×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
IBS-SSS			×			×		×		×		×		×			×
IBS-QOL			×			×		×		×		×		×			×
PHQ-9			×			×		×		×		×		×			×
Extraintestinal symptoms			×							×							×
Credibility/Expectancy					×												
Blinding assessment				×			×										
Adverse events				×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×

Table 2 Acupoints used in the sensitive acupoints group

Acupoint	Location
LI 11 ( <i>Quchi</i> )	Lateral to the elbow, at the midpoint of the line between LU5( <i>Chize</i> ) and the lateral epicondyle of the humerus.
LI 4( <i>Hegu</i> )	It is located on the dorsum of the hand, between the first and second metacarpal bones, approximately at the midpoint of the radial side of the second metacarpal bone.
ST 25( <i>Tianshu</i> )	In the epigastric region, transversely aligned with the umbilicus, 2 cun lateral to the anterior midline.
CV 12( <i>Zhongwan</i> )	In the epigastric region, located 4 cun superior to the umbilicus along the anterior midline.
CV 4( <i>Guanyuan</i> )	In the hypogastric region, 3 cun below the umbilicus along the anterior midline.
CV 10( <i>Xiawan</i> )	In the epigastric region, located 2 cun superior to the umbilicus along the anterior midline.
CV 6( <i>Qihai</i> )	In the hypogastric region, 1.5 cun below the umbilicus along the anterior midline.
SP 15( <i>Daheng</i> )	In the epigastric region, transversely aligned with the umbilicus, 4 cun lateral to the anterior midline.
SP16( <i>Fuai</i> )	In the epigastric region,3 cun above the midpoint of the umbilicus, and 4 cun lateral to the anterior midline.
BL 25( <i>Dachangshu</i> )	The point is located at the waist, 1.5 cun lateral to the posterior midline, under the spinous process of the fourth lumbar vertebra.
BL 21( <i>Weishu</i> )	The point is located at the waist, 1.5 cun lateral to the posterior midline, under the spinous process of the twelfth thoracic vertebra.
BL 27( <i>Xiaochangshu</i> )	The point is located at the sacral region, parallel to the first posterior sacral foramen and 1.5 cun away from the median sacral crest.
ST 36( <i>Zusanli</i> )	The point is located on the lateral aspect of the calf, 3 cun below ST35 ( <i>Dubi</i> ), and along the trajectory between ST35 ( <i>Dubi</i> ) and ST41 ( <i>Jiexi</i> ).
ST 37( <i>Shangjuxu</i> )	The point is located on the lateral aspect of the calf, 6 cun below ST35 ( <i>Dubi</i> ), and along the trajectory between ST35 ( <i>Dubi</i> ) and ST41 ( <i>Jiexi</i> ).
SP 6( <i>Sanyinjiao</i> )	The point is located medially to the calf, 3 cun above the tip of the medial malleolus, and posterior to the medial margin of the tibia.
SP 9( <i>Yinlingquan</i> )	The point is located on the medial side of the calf, in the depression formed by the lower margin of the medial condyle of the tibia and the medial margin of the tibia.
ST 39( <i>Xiajuxu</i> )	The point is located on the lateral aspect of the calf, 9 cun below ST35 ( <i>Dubi</i> ), and along the trajectory between ST35 ( <i>Dubi</i> ) and ST41 ( <i>Jiexi</i> ).

Table 3 Acupoints used in the sham acupuncture group

Non-acupoint	Location
Non-acupoint 1	The point is situated on the upper limb, at the midpoint between LU5( <i>Chize</i> ) and LI7( <i>Wenliu</i> ).
Non-acupoint 2	The point is located in the abdomen, 2 cun above the anterior superior iliac spine, between the gall bladder meridian and the spleen meridian.
Non-acupoint 3	The point is located in the abdomen, 2 cun below the umbilicus and 1 cun lateral to the anterior midline, between the renal meridian and the gastric meridian.
Non-acupoint 4	The point is located in the lower extremity, on the lateral leg, 3 cun below the GB34 ( <i>Yanglingquan</i> ), between the gall bladder meridian and the bladder meridian.
Non-acupoint 5	The point is located 2 cun above the medial malleolus, on the medial aspect of the tibia, between the liver meridian and the spleen meridian in the lower extremity.