

A guide for patients having acupuncture

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is one of the oldest recorded forms of medicine having been used in China for over 3,000 years. Modern science has shown that acupuncture can stimulate the brain to produce natural pain relieving chemicals (endorphins). These assist the body to heal itself and give pain relief. The traditional Chinese belief is that energy flows freely throughout the body via channels. When there is a problem the energy stagnates. Stimulation by acupuncture, at various points, helps to restore the healthy flow of energy in the body and can help to relax areas of tension.

What will it involve?

- Treatment will consist of the insertion of fine needles into different parts of the body. These are sterile, single use and disposable, ensuring strict hygiene practice.
- The needle insertion may feel like a mild pinprick and should only give temporary discomfort. You may then feel a mild ache, numbness, warmth and/ or heavy sensation in the area being treated. This is referred to as 'De Qi'. This is also a sign that the body is reacting to the acupuncture. The needles may be stimulated by a twisting motion at regular intervals throughout your treatment.
- The number of needles and where they are inserted will vary dependent on how your symptoms present and the condition being treated. The needles may be left in place for up to half an hour.
- It can sometimes take several treatments to produce a noticeable benefit.
- Acupuncture needles are often inserted into trigger points (tight, sensitive areas in the muscles) to relieve pain and restore movement.

What are the benefits?

Chartered Physiotherapists use acupuncture specifically to relieve pain. They are in a unique position of being able to combine acupuncture with other treatment methods such as exercises, manipulation and stretching. This combined approach is more likely to lead to successful rehabilitation.

What are the risks?

There are some instances where acupuncture treatment requires caution or should not be used. This treatment may not be suitable for you if:

- You are pregnant (especially in the first trimester).
- You suffer from epilepsy (especially if uncontrolled).
- You have diabetes (especially if poorly controlled).
- You have rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and are experiencing an acute flare of symptoms (this is especially if the area to be treated is around a joint).
- You have heart or circulatory problems. This includes heart valve dysfunctions, rheumatic fever and unstable heart conditions.
- You have a pacemaker.
- You have haemophilia/ blood clotting disorders.
- You currently have or have had cancer.
- You have moles, lumps or cancerous growths in the area to be treated.
- You have had an acute haemorrhagic stroke.
- You are taking immune-suppressant drugs.
- You have any blood borne infection e.g. hepatitis, HIV.
- You have an allergy to metal.
- Your skin is in poor condition in the area to be treated.
- The area to be treated is swollen e.g. lymphoedema or acute bruising.
- You have a recent infection in the area to be treated.
- You are taking anticoagulant tablets (blood thinning). Your latest INR result will need to be checked.
- You are taking steroid tablets.
- You have a needle phobia.
- You are unable to give consent to treatment.

Caution needs to be taken if:

- You are fatigued or hungry at the time of treatment.
- You are feeling systemically unwell.
- You are in the second or third trimesters of pregnancy.
- You have low or high blood pressure.
- You have impaired skin sensation over the area to be treated.
- You are taking systemic steroids.
- You have thrombocytopaenia.

Initial treatments carry a small risk of temporarily increasing your symptoms.

You may also feel mildly fatigued the evening of your treatment.

Very occasionally, a bruise may occur at the needle site; this nothing to worry about.

Rarely, you may feel faint for a few minutes after treatment.

It is not advisable to attend if you are feeling unwell, or are suffering from a severe cold or flu.

Depending on your clinical needs and diagnosis, alternatives to acupuncture therapy can be discussed with your physiotherapist.

Frequently asked questions.

Will it hurt?

You should feel no more than a mild discomfort as the needles are inserted as they are very fine. You may then feel a mild ache, numbness, warmth and/or heavy sensation in the area being treated.

Can I drive home after treatment?

You should be fine to drive home afterwards unless you feel faint, excessively tired or unwell after the treatment.

How will know if it is working?

Be patient, acupuncture is not a “quick fix”, but the effects can build up over several treatments. Remember it works best when combined with any exercises you have been advised to do.

How long to the benefits last for?

This varies enormously from person to person. Please discuss this with your physiotherapist.

Why a physiotherapist?

Chartered physiotherapists are specialists in the treatment of a wide range of conditions. They are trained to degree level and then undertake post graduate training in acupuncture. Research supports the effectiveness of acupuncture for pain relief and it is therefore used by physiotherapists as part of a comprehensive treatment plan. They work with GPs and consultants and are bound by a strict professional and ethical code.

The treatment for your condition may require more than one visit. If you have any other questions about your treatment please ask your physiotherapist.

More information can be found on the AACP website – www.aacp.org.uk

Contact information

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Further information

More information is available on the Trust website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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