



*Better
Together*

Patient information

A Guide to Acupuncture Treatment

Therapies Directorate

How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture is an ancient system of Traditional Chinese Medicine based on the invisible channels – known as Meridians – that circulate vital energy and are joined by a series of acupuncture points.

Modern science has shown that acupuncture is believed to work by stimulating the brain to produce natural pain relieving chemicals called endorphins, which assist the body to heal itself.

The physiotherapists use it for various conditions including acute or chronic injuries, arthritis, back and neck pain and muscle and joint problems.

How is it done?

- Very fine, single-use, sterile disposable needles are inserted into selected points of the body.
- During the treatment these may be stimulated manually (by hand), electrically, or by heat.
- This is done with the patient in a comfortable, supported position.
- The treatment may take up to thirty minutes during which you will be monitored regularly.
- You will be advised to take a short rest and not to drive immediately if you feel tired.
- Please make sure you have something to eat before your treatment.

What will I feel?

You may feel a slight pinprick as the needle goes into your skin. You may then feel an ache, tingling, warmth or mild discomfort.

Will it work for me?

Research has shown that most people gain relief of pain with acupuncture. This can be immediate or may need two or three treatments to be achieved.

Other benefits may include:

- Increased range of movement.
- Improved sense of well-being.
- Improved sleep/increased relaxation.

Patients often respond to acupuncture where conventional treatments have failed.

However, if you have not noticed a response after two to three treatments then your Physiotherapist may talk to you about discontinuing the treatment.

Is acupuncture safe?

Generally it is very safe. Serious side effects are very rare – less than one per 10,000 treatments.

Acupuncture is safe when undertaken by a Physiotherapist who has completed an acupuncture course approved by the Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapist. They are trained to use the strictest hygiene and only pre-sterilised disposable needles are used.

Are there any alternatives available?

If, following assessment, acupuncture is considered unsuitable for you, you may be referred back to your doctor for pain medication.'

Is there anything your physiotherapist needs to know?

Apart from your usual medical details, including any medicines you are using, we need to know:

- If you have ever experienced a fit, faint or funny turn.
- If you have a pacemaker or any other electrical implants.
- If you are pregnant (acupuncture will only be offered at your Physiotherapists discretion).
- If you have a bleeding disorder or take anticoagulants.
- If you have damaged heart valves or have any other particular risk of infection.
- If you have unstable angina, irregular heartbeats or any other heart problems.
- If you have diabetes.
- If you have low blood pressure.
- Very rarely, trauma can occur to internal organs when certain points are used. Physiotherapists are trained to avoid high-risk points.
- If you are allergic to metal.
- If you have any moles or skin infections.
- If you are feeling unwell e.g. cold/flu.

If you have a phobia of needles please tell your physiotherapist who may be able to offer you a non-invasive option.

Your physiotherapist will discuss these and any other possible issues with you and you will be asked to sign a consent form.

Does acupuncture have side effects?

You need to be aware that drowsiness occurs after treatment in a small number of patients and if you are affected we advise you not to drive or operate machinery.

- Minor bleeding or bruising occurs after acupuncture in about 3% of treatments.
- Pain during treatment occurs in about 1% of treatments.
- Existing symptoms can get worse after treatment (less than 3%). You should tell your therapist about this, but it is usually a good sign.
- Fainting or nausea can occur in certain patients particularly after the first treatment.

If there are any particular risks that apply to you, your physiotherapist will discuss these with you.

Further information

If you have any concerns before or during your treatment, please discuss these with your physiotherapist.

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