

Acupuncture Information for patients

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a form of therapy in which fine needles are inserted into specific points in the body to produce a therapeutic effect. Evidence has shown it to be useful in treating pain from a variety of conditions and this is now a widely accepted treatment within the NHS. Although it does not work for everybody or every condition, good results are often achieved.

How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture causes the release of hormones and chemicals which send signals to your brain and spinal cord to “block” some of the pain messages that your brain is receiving. This reduction in pain can in turn lead to increased movement and function at the affected joint.

Sometimes acupuncture can be used to directly reduce muscle spasm, or to relieve tenderness in specific areas of tight and /or tender muscles.

Will it hurt?

Acupuncture is not often described as a painful treatment. A brief sharp sensation is usually felt as the needle penetrates the skin. This is then sometimes followed by a mild, heavy, dull ache. This sensation is unique to each individual.

How many needles will be used?

Treatments will vary depending on the individual and the condition being treated. Commonly, between two and ten needles will be used.

How long will the needles be in for?

The needles will usually be in for between 10 and 30 minutes.

Where will the needles be placed?

Needles may be inserted:

- In and around the painful area
- Away from the painful area (e.g. in the hands and feet)
- On the opposite side of the body

This is because there is evidence that needling away from the painful area can be effective.

How many treatments are needed?

The pain-relieving effects of acupuncture build up as the treatment progresses. Usually a positive effect can be experienced within three to four sessions. If no improvement has been achieved by this time, your Physiotherapist may discontinue acupuncture treatment. If you are beginning to improve, treatment will usually continue for up to six sessions.

Needle stimulation

Once the needles are in place, your Physiotherapist may gently stimulate the needles at intervals throughout treatment by gently rotating them. The aim of this is to maintain the dull, heavy sensation, which has been found to increase the pain-relieving effects of acupuncture.

Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is generally very safe treatment. Single-use, sterile, disposable needles are used in this department and all Physiotherapists who use acupuncture have had additional, specific training which they are required to update regularly.

Are there any possible adverse effects?

The following are the known (based on research evidence) possible adverse effects associated with acupuncture, your physiotherapist will discuss these with you and explain if you are at any enhanced risk:

- Bleeding and Bruising (3%)
- Mild aggravation of symptoms (3%, of which 70-85% show subsequent improvement)
- Mild Pain at the needle site (1%)
- Drowsiness (1%)
- Dizziness (0.6%)
- Pain not at needle site (0.5%)
- Nausea (0.3%)
- Feeling faint (0.3%)
- Stuck or bent needle (0.1%)
- Headache (0.1%)
- Allergy or infection (up to 0.2%)
- Pneumothorax (0.0002%/ less than 2 per 1 million)

Although acupuncture is an established procedure, there may be other adverse effects that have not been recorded. If you experience any of the above or notice anything unusual about your health following your treatment, then you should contact your physiotherapist or GP straight away.

When is acupuncture not appropriate?

- If you have an unstable heart condition
- If you have poorly controlled epilepsy or diabetes
- If you have a known stainless steel or nickel allergy
- If you have a severe phobia of needles
- If you have an infection in the area to be needled
- If you are pregnant (your acupuncture will need to be performed by someone with specialist training).

If you fall into any of these categories please let your Physiotherapist know, as it is unlikely that acupuncture will be appropriate for you.

How should I prepare for my acupuncture treatment?

Read this information leaflet carefully and ask any questions or highlight any concerns you have with your Physiotherapist. Bring appropriate clothing to your treatment, including shorts if your problem is in the leg or back. If you have long hair, make sure you have some way of putting it up.

Make sure you have something to eat within at least two hours before your appointment time, as there is increased risk of fainting or drowsiness if you have acupuncture on an empty stomach.

Coventry Adult Physiotherapy Service - 024 7696 1335

If you require this document in a different format or language please contact the Trust's Equality and Diversity Team on 024 7653 6802

Ref: Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (2017) Safe Practice Guidelines for Acupuncture Physiotherapists V3; MacPherson H., Thomas K., Walters S., Fitter M. (2001) A prospective survey of adverse events and treatment reactions following 34,000 consultations with professional acupuncturists. *Acupuncture in Medicine* 19 (2) 93-102; White A., Hayhoe S., Hart A., Ernst E., Volunteers from BMAS and AACP (2001) Survey of adverse events following acupuncture (SAFA): A prospective study of 32,000 consultations. *Acupuncture in Medicine* 19 (2) 84-92; White A. (2006) The safety of acupuncture- evidence from the UK. *Acupuncture in Medicine* 24 S53-57