

What is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture involves inserting fine needles into specific points in the body. Acupuncture stimulates the release of pain relieving chemicals called endorphins. Research shows that endorphins are released directly where the needle is inserted and throughout the body. Acupuncture can therefore help pain in areas of the body other than the one being treated.

Acupuncture also stimulates the release of chemicals which speed up healing.

Acupuncture is available within the NHS because there is now enough scientific evidence which shows it can help reduce muscle and joint pains.

When is it used?

Acupuncture is generally used along-side other therapies, such as life-style modifications, activity modification and exercises.

Throughout your treatment you will be encouraged to use long-term self-management strategies to make the most of any benefits of acupuncture.

In addition, acupuncture can help reduce the amount of pain killing or anti-inflammatory medication you are taking.

Routine repeat acupuncture is not available.

What should I expect?

After gaining your consent and screening for contraindications, the physiotherapist will insert sterile single use disposable needles into specific points in your body.

These points could be in the region of your pain or away from it depending on how acute your pain is. Generally, between two and 20 needles are inserted at any one time, for 5 to 25 minutes.

When the needles are inserted you may feel a pinprick sensation followed by an achy, numb, tingly or warm sensation. This sensation is referred to as “De Qi” and is thought to be necessary for a treatment to be effective.

The physiotherapist may stimulate the needles to achieve this sensation. This is done by gently rotating the needle or by flicking or scratching it.

Like most treatments some people respond better than others. Generally, if your pain has not reduced after three treatments it is unlikely that you will benefit from continued acupuncture. Alternative treatments should then be discussed with your physiotherapist.

A course of treatment usually ranges from one to six once weekly sessions.

When is acupuncture not appropriate?

Acupuncture should not be used if you have:

- Infected, thin or fragile skin
- Poorly controlled epilepsy or history of unexplained convulsions
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- Spontaneous bleeding or bruising
- Valvular heart disease
- Unstable heart condition
- Pacemaker or intra-cardiac defibrillator (electro-acupuncture)
- Pregnant (first trimester)
- A known metal allergy (stainless steel)
- A needle phobia

Caution should be taken if you:

- Have haemophilia
- Are diabetic
- Suffer from epilepsy
- Have a deficient or weak immune system
- Are pregnant or trying to conceive
- Are taking medication to thin your blood

Please discuss any of the above health conditions prior to commencing acupuncture.

Are there any side effects?

Possible, temporary side effects include:

- Drowsiness
- Temporary increase in pain (24-48hrs)
- Discomfort, bleeding or bruising at needle site
- Feeling light headed /fainting
- Nausea

Extremely rare serious side effects

- Damage to an internal organ
- Infection of previously damaged heart valves
- Local infection at needle site
- Premature onset of labour in pregnancy

What can I do to reduce side effects?

Discuss your medical conditions or concerns with the physiotherapist.

Make sure you have eaten in the last four hours prior to acupuncture

Please inform your physiotherapist if you feel unwell or uncomfortable during the treatment. Let them know if you have any adverse reaction following your treatment.

How safe is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is extremely safe in appropriately qualified hands.

All physiotherapists using acupuncture within the Trust have successfully completed a professionally accredited training course. Trust policy requires that staff are regularly tested on their clinical skills, ensuring they are safe to practice.

Acupuncture is safer than most drugs used for pain relief, with fewer side effects, especially in the long-term.

Further Information

The Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists website.

www.aacp.uk.com

www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.net

@TSDFT_NHS

Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

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PATIENT INFORMATION

Acupuncture in Physiotherapy Information Leaflet

