

Acupuncture

Pain Management Patient Information Leaflet

Please read this leaflet carefully and ask your pain nurse if there is anything you do not understand, or if you have any other concerns.

Introduction

This leaflet is for people who are considering acupuncture to help relieve pain. It includes information on what acupuncture is, its benefits and risks and what happens when you have acupuncture treatment.

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture comes from traditional Chinese medicine which dates back 3,000 years. It is based on the concept of treating the whole body and the body's ability to return to its natural, balanced state of health.

Western medical acupuncture is the use of acupuncture after a proper medical diagnosis. It is based on scientific evidence that shows the treatment can stimulate nerves under the skin and in muscle tissue.

This results in the body producing pain-relieving substances such as endorphins. It is likely these substances are responsible for any beneficial effects seen with this form of acupuncture.

Traditional acupuncture is based on the belief that an energy, or 'life force', flows through the body in channels called meridians. This life force is known as qi (pronounced "chee").

Practitioners who have traditional beliefs about acupuncture believe that when qi does not flow freely through the body, this can cause illness. They also believe acupuncture can restore the flow of qi, and so restore health.

Who will give me the treatment?

Fully-trained pain nurses will give you the treatment. Our pain nurses who practise acupuncture have received specialist training to meet the standards of the British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS).

What are the benefits of acupuncture?

Acupuncture can help relieve pain caused by damaged nerves and muscular pain.

What happens before acupuncture treatment?

You will need to have something to eat during the two hours before your treatment.

You will have an assessment where a pain nurse will ask you about your medical history. You will need to be in good general health to have acupuncture. If you have one of the following conditions, this may affect your treatment:

- Diabetes
- Epilepsy
- Haemophilia
- Reduced immunity
- Low blood pressure
- Heart problems or have a pacemaker
- Have a metal allergy
- Have an infection in the area to be treated
- Have a phobia to needles (you are scared of needles)
- You are pregnant
- You are taking anticoagulants (medication to thin your blood)

The pain nurse will explain the treatment to you and if you would like to continue, you will need to sign a consent form.

What happens during acupuncture treatment?

- You will be asked to sit or lie down for the treatment.
- The pain nurse will insert sterilised, single-use, disposable needles into specific acupuncture points in the body. The points used will depend on your condition.
- Some may be close to the area that is being treated and some may be further away.
- The needles may be inserted just under your skin or deeper into the muscle tissue. Once they are in place, they may be left in position for a few minutes, up to 30 minutes.
- Your pain nurse will constantly monitor you and will be with you throughout the treatment.

Will it hurt?

You may feel some of the following:

- Warmth or 'fullness' in the area being treated.
- Pins and needles, or numbness.
- Aching or discomfort around the needle.
- Sharp pain – this should only last a few seconds. If it lasts longer than this, please tell your pain nurse.

These feelings are sometimes known as the acupuncture sensation, also called 'de qi'.

It is possible that you may feel nothing at all.

How long does the treatment last?

The course of acupuncture will consist of six sessions depending on your response to the treatment. Each session will last about 20 minutes.

What are the risks of acupuncture?

Acupuncture is safe when it is conducted by a qualified practitioner. However, there are some mild, short-lasting side effects that sometimes occur. It is important that we tell you about these so that you can make a decision about whether to have the treatment.

- You may feel drowsy after the treatment. For this reason, we advise you not to drive home afterwards.
- Minor bleeding or bruising around the injection sites (about four people out of one hundred may get this).
- Pain during treatment (about two people out of one hundred may get this).
- Existing symptoms can get worse to begin with (about three in one hundred people have this). Do not worry, as it is often a sign that the treatment will work.
- Some patients may faint especially during their first treatment.

Serious complications are very rare (about two people in 10,000 get them) but could include:

- Damage to an internal organ caused by the needle
- Infection
- Injury to nerves

These usually only occur as the result of bad practice, when acupuncture is carried out by a practitioner who has not been properly trained.

What are the alternatives?

Acupuncture is one of a number of techniques used by pain nurses to help you. Your pain nurse will discuss these techniques with you and then you can decide whether you would like to have acupuncture. You do not need to have this treatment.

Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following website:

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Acupuncture/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

References

Endres HG, Molsberger A, Lungenhausen M and Trampisch HJ (2004). An internal standard for verifying the accuracy of serious adverse event reporting: the example of an acupuncture study of 190,924 patients. *Eur J Med Res.* 9(12): p545-551.

MacPherson H, Thomas K, Walters S and Fitter M (2001). A prospective survey of adverse events and treatment reactions following 34,000 consultations with professional acupuncturists. *Acupunct Med.* 19(2): p93-102.

Zhang J, Shang H, Gao X and Ernst E (2010). Acupuncture-related adverse events: a systematic review of the Chinese literature. *Bull World Health Organ.* 88(12): p915-921.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Pain management helpline on 01384 244735 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/pain-management/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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