

ACUPUNCTURE INFORMATION (ADULTS)

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medicine which has been used for 1000's of years. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) says that acupuncture affects the flow of energy (they call this Qi or "chi") through lines called *meridians* that run between the internal organs and close to the surface of the body. Acupuncture points are places on the body surface where you can tap into the meridian and affect the Qi. By choosing certain combinations of acupuncture points, the feeling & functions of body areas along the meridians can be improved.

Physiotherapists can study & train in acupuncture to treat the sorts of conditions they see in their everyday practice. This is commonly for pain, headaches, muscle tightness, arthritis, swollen / sore joints and stiffness.

How does it work?

Much research has been done in recent years to try to explain how acupuncture works from a scientific, 'Western medicine' viewpoint. It has been proven to release natural substances in the brain & body that reduce pain and inflammation (such as endorphins—natural morphine-related pain killers), and to reduce the sensitivity of tender points in the body. It also promotes sleep by stimulating the release of melatonin in the brain and encourages a sense of well-being by stimulating the release of serotonin.

The effects of acupuncture build up in your body with each of the first 3-4 treatments. It works best if the first 4 treatments are once or twice a week.

Acupuncture needles will often be placed all around the body in addition to the problem area. This makes it more effective and is an important part of how it works. The stainless steel needles are sterilised & disposable, meaning they are only used on you once. They are disposed of in a clinical "sharps" container.

If there has been no effect after 4 or 5 treatments, you may be one of the very few people who don't respond to acupuncture & we should try another type of physiotherapy treatment, which we can also offer.

Are they big needles?

No. Acupuncture needles are very thin and flexible stainless steel. They are quickly tapped into the skin over acupuncture points, which can be in most areas of the body, such as hands, feet, head, as well as the areas you are having trouble with. They go into the skin approximately 5mm deep and sometimes more if the acupuncture point is in the muscle, but this doesn't mean that they hurt any more than the surface points!

However, if you really don't like needles, acupuncture is not the right treatment for you, and we can offer needle-free acupuncture, laser or regular physiotherapy instead.

Does it hurt?

People tend not to feel the needles going in, or just feel a brief sensation which is usually a mild dull ache. Traditional Chinese Medicine says that a dull ache is movement of energy in the acupuncture point, and therefore a positive thing! It feels *nothing like* an injection or a blood test.

If you find that it is uncomfortable and change your mind about having acupuncture, no problem! The physio can try another type of physio treatment. Be assured there is no pressure to "grin and bear it"!

What conditions does acupuncture treat?

Anything you see a physiotherapist for can potentially be treated with acupuncture, however the physio needs to assess and diagnose your condition first. They will then discuss their findings with you and what the best treatment is likely to be, and you can decide together. Commonly treated problems are:

- Pain e.g., nerve pain, neck and back pain
- Headaches & migraine
- Muscle tightness and trigger points
- Arthritis (all types)
- Swollen / sore joints
- Joint stiffness
- Long term conditions such as Achilles tendonitis, tennis elbow, repetitive strain conditions, persistent bursitis, rotator cuff degeneration.

If you're not sure, please ask the physio.

Your medical conditions:

It is *really important* that you tell the physio about any medical problems and any medication you take, as some of these might mean it is not safe for you to have acupuncture.

Who CAN'T have acupuncture:

It is not safe for you to have acupuncture if:

- you are pregnant
- have seizures
- are taking blood thinning drugs
- have haemophilia
- are under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs
- have metastatic cancer (cancer in more than one place in the body)
- you are allergic to stainless steel
- you have CJD, Hepatitis A, B or C, or HIV/AIDS
- you're under 16 years old

You cannot have acupuncture *near or over the site* of a pacemaker, an open / healing wound or infection, or in an area of poor circulation. You can have it in other places.

Risks:

There are very few risks with acupuncture treatment as it is safe to have, provided you don't have one of the conditions above. Any acupuncture points that could be dangerous are always avoided.

- Bleeding/bruising or aching at site of needle insertion (occasional)
- Allergic reaction to the metal in the needle (stainless steel) (rare)
- Infection at the site of the needle (very rare)

Possible Side Effects:

Most people feel relaxed and sometimes feel a little sleepy towards the end of treatment. The physio will ensure you are feeling well and alert before you leave, especially if you are driving.

Rarely, people feel a bit dizzy or sick, as acupuncture can lower blood pressure, in which case the physio will take the needles out straight away. The person then recovers quickly.

Most people find their symptoms are better or the same after the first treatment.

Occasionally people's symptoms slightly worsen after treatment – this tells us that we are on the right track. It usually settles down after the second treatment.

How do I prepare for the first appointment?

Please make sure you've had something to eat and drink in the few hours prior to your appointment so you don't have low blood sugar or low blood pressure.

Clothing: You will need to undress (keeping your underwear ON) for the physio to examine the area you're having issue with. Acupuncture needles will be placed all around the body in addition to the problem area. This makes it much more effective and is an important part of how it works. Some people prefer to bring or wear shorts, and ladies may like to wear a strappy vest-top or something similar.

What happens at the first appointment?

The physio will ask you questions about the issue that you'd like treatment for, how long it's been bothering you, any treatment you might have already had and any medical conditions you may have. It is *really important* that you tell the physio about any medical problems and any medication you take, as some of these might mean it is not safe for you to have acupuncture, or it may not work.

The physio will examine you (please see above about undressing) and then you can lie or sit on the treatment couch in a comfortable position. Several needles will be quickly tapped in, and you will just relax. The physio will cover you up as best as possible to keep you warm and comfortable while you're relaxing with your needles in.

The needles are left in place for at least 20-30 minutes. They are then removed (this is painless) and disposed of in a sharps container. The physio will check you're feeling well and alert before you leave. Some people like to sit quietly for a few minutes and sip some water before they head off.

Some people feel very relaxed and like an early night after acupuncture, however most people don't feel any different to normal.

Further questions?

Please ask the physio who will be happy to answer any questions.

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