



# Acupuncture

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## Information for patients from the Acupuncture Steering Group

Acupuncture is one of several types of treatment that your physiotherapist may be able to offer you. Those physiotherapists who practise acupuncture use it alongside other treatments such as exercise and joint movement as part of your rehabilitation.

### What is acupuncture?

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) acupuncture has been traced back as far as 1000BC. It developed from a concept of inserting needles into the body as a means of balancing the movement and levels of 'Qi' (energy life force) within the body. It is thought, by some, that an imbalance of Qi leads to disease, pain, or disability.

Acupuncture is now widely accepted within western medicine, where research has demonstrated that inserting needles into the body changes the way the brain processes signals of pain, making them less severe. It also stimulates the release of the body's own painkilling hormones.

### What does acupuncture involve?

Sterile, single use needles are used. These are fine (a lot finer than an injection needle) and are inserted quickly through your skin, into your tissues. Acupuncture needling should not be painful although some people do report a pinprick or scratch like sensation.

Once the needles are in place you may feel a mild ache, numbness, warm or heavy sensation at and around the needle. This should not be unpleasant and is known as "De Qi". It can be a sign that your body's inbuilt pain relieving mechanisms are being stimulated.

Once the needles are in place your physiotherapist may gently manually stimulate the needle. This may be repeated.

Needles can also be stimulated using electrical impulses, called electro-acupuncture. The needles are attached to a battery-operated machine which causes a tingling sensation to be felt at the site of the needle.



### **How many needles will be used?**

Treatment can involve the insertion of between one to 16 needles.

### **How long are the needles in for?**

The needles may only be in place for a few seconds. More often they will be in place for between 10 to 30 minutes.

### **Where will the needles be placed?**

Needles can be inserted:

- around the painful area,
- on the opposite side of the body; or
- away from the painful area (hands or feet).

### **How many treatments are needed?**

Your physiotherapist will discuss your individual management plan. Acupuncture treatments may vary depending on the condition being treated and how you respond to treatment. Often acupuncture is used to promote active rehabilitation.

### **Is it safe?**

Physiotherapists practising acupuncture in East Kent Hospitals have been trained to a minimum standard and are bound by professional codes of conduct through the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

### **What are the possible side effects?**

- Discomfort at the needle site
- Bruising at the needle site
- Temporary increase of pain
- Fainting or feeling faint/dizzy
- Drowsiness and tiredness following treatment
- A stuck or bent needle.

The following are possible risks that can happen in rare occasions with acupuncture.

- Infection at the needle site
- Infection from hepatitis or HIV
- Damage to an internal organ from needle insertion
- Infection which may infect previously damaged heart valves
- Premature onset of labour, in pregnancy.

## When should you not have acupuncture?

- If you have a known metal allergy to stainless steel
- If you have a fear of needles (phobia)
- If you have a known infection in the area to be needled.

The following conditions do not exclude you from having acupuncture but you should let your physiotherapist know if you:

- have haemophilia
- are pregnant or trying to get pregnant (conceive)
- suffer from epilepsy
- have a deficient immune system
- have a heart pacemaker
- are taking anticoagulants (blood thinning medication)
- are diabetic.

## Recommendations

It is advised that you have something to eat within two hours before your acupuncture treatment. It is also advised that you do not drive after your first acupuncture treatment if you feel unwell.

## Where can I get further information?

If you have any questions, need further information, or experience any side effects, please speak to your physiotherapist.

There are also some useful websites you may wish to visit.

- **Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists**  
Web: [www.aacp.org.uk/](http://www.aacp.org.uk/)
- **NHS Choices**  
Web: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/acupuncture/pages/introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/acupuncture/pages/introduction.aspx)

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