

'I HIGHLY RECOMMEND IT'

'I've been having acupuncture to help ease the pain of arthritis. It definitely works for me. Some of the medication I had left me with unpleasant side effects, but acupuncture has been pain-free and I've not had any of these side effects. I'd definitely recommend acupuncture to those in pain.'

Kevin, 58

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture involves the insertion of very fine stainless steel needles into the skin. It has been used in China for over 2,000 years and increasingly in Western medicine with a growing body of scientific evidence and clinical research supporting its effectiveness.

Acupuncture may be used as alongside physiotherapy treatment modalities to treat a wide range of common health problems and to reduce pain. For example in September 2012, NICE recognised acupuncture's benefits for migraines and tension-type headaches. It can also be used when other more conventional treatments have failed.

How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture stimulates the body to produce endorphins and oxytocin, its own pain and stress-relieving chemicals. It may promote sleep by stimulating the release of melatonin in the body and may encourage a sense of well-being by stimulating the release of serotonin.

Acupuncture also stimulates nerve fibres to block out pain signals and helps to reduce the sensitivity of tender points in the body.

What happens when I see my physiotherapist for acupuncture?

You should aim to have something to eat in the 2 hours before your treatment. This will help reduce the risk of you feeling faint during your session by keeping your sugar levels up.

When you first see your physiotherapist, he or she will take your full medical history and ask you about your current health problems. You may be asked to complete an "Acupuncture in Physiotherapy Consent Form".

The number of needles used will vary according to your condition and symptoms, but typically will range from 1 to 10 in your first session.

The needles are inserted through the skin either at the sites where you feel pain, away from the pain or a combination of both. The needles are usually left in for as little as a few seconds or for up to 30 minutes. During the treatment, your physiotherapist may stimulate the needles by gently rotating them.

The needles may also be stimulated using electrical impulses, this is called electro-acupuncture.

The needles are removed at the end of the session. You will then be asked to rest for a few minutes before you leave.

How many sessions will I have?

Some people may require just one or two treatments and some a course of 6-10 treatments, whereas others may want to receive occasional treatments as and when required.

The overall number of treatment sessions required will depend on you, your condition and your physiotherapist's assessment. The frequency of treatments will be guided by how you respond to the treatment.

It is generally clear after around 3 sessions whether or not acupuncture will benefit you and if the treatment should be continued.

How long until I see an improvement in my condition?

Different people respond in different ways and at different rates. Some people may feel an immediate relief of their symptoms whilst others may see a gradual improvement after a few treatments whereas some may see no benefit. Some people may find that their condition/symptoms flare up for up to 24 hours after the treatment but then see a marked improvement.

Although acupuncture can help reduce pain, particularly when other more conventional treatments have failed, it does not work for everyone.

Can anyone have acupuncture?

There are certain health conditions that may stop you receiving acupuncture or mean that the treatment should be used with caution. It is important to let your physiotherapist know if you:

- have ever experienced a fit, seizure, faint or if you have epilepsy;
- have a pacemaker or any other electrical implant;
- have a bleeding disorder e.g. haemophilia;
- are taking anti-coagulants or any other medication;
- have any heart valve problems;
- have any risk of active infections;
- are pregnant or trying to conceive;
- have a known metal allergy – specifically to stainless steel;
- have a needle phobia;
- have a known infection or poor skin condition in the area to be treated;
- have a deficient or weakened immune system;
- have diabetes;
- have low blood pressure;
- have been prescribed any medicine;
- have cold/flu symptoms or feel generally unwell.

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