

## ACUPUNCTURE TREATMENT FOR PAIN RELIEF IN MUSCULOSKELETAL CONDITIONS

### What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is one of the oldest recorded forms of medicine having been used in China for over 3,000 years. The insertion of a fine needle into the skin is believed to reduce pain by stimulating the brain and spinal cord to produce natural pain relieving chemicals such as endorphins, melatonin (which promotes sleep) and serotonin (to promote well-being).

### What sort of problems can acupuncture be used for?

Acupuncture has been used to treat many medical problems. It is particularly useful in musculoskeletal conditions as it can help with back and neck pain, muscle and joint problems and headaches.

### Will acupuncture work for me?

Acupuncture does not work for everybody or for every condition, but good results are frequently achieved when more conventional treatments have been tried and failed. Unfortunately about a quarter of patients called 'non responders' do not seem to benefit from acupuncture. The effect of acupuncture is usually accumulative and pain relief builds up as treatment progresses. Some patients may feel worse initially, and most generally require at least three treatments before noticing any change.

### What are the advantages of acupuncture?

With an injury or a condition that is due to overuse, by reducing your pain with treatment you will be able to start your recovery and return to normal activities in the shortest possible time. If you have a chronic condition you will be advised when you can begin to increase both your day-to-day activities and physiotherapy rehabilitation exercises. The emphasis is always on helping you to have more control of your symptoms and to become independent of therapy.

### Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is very safe. Physiotherapists are highly trained in the assessment and treatment of musculoskeletal conditions. They adhere to a strict code of professional conduct and undertake a responsibility to themselves and their patients in both the principles of the safe, hygienic insertion of needles and their safe disposal after the treatment.

### What are the possible side effects of acupuncture?

Whilst side effects are documented they are not common i.e. less than 1 per 10,000 treatments. Every effort is made to minimise any risk for the patient. Most people experience no problems at all; minor side effects such as bruising or bleeding occur infrequently and other side effects e.g. feeling faint or light-headed, and drowsiness or sleepiness, are even less common. Serious side effects such as infection or damage to an internal organ caused by a needle are very rare indeed.

### I've always heard that acupuncture is painful. Is it?

This is the most commonly asked question. The needles are very thin – much finer than an injection needle - and most patients are surprised at how little they feel. It is normal to feel a slight prick as the needle is inserted. The patient feels a 'needling' sensation called De Qi. This may be described as a mild ache, numbness or warmth and is usually temporary and not unpleasant. At times a more intense sensation is experienced. This is thought to indicate the movement of energy at the acupuncture point. Your physiotherapist may gently stimulate the needles during treatment to achieve the sensation of de Qi.

### Are there any times that I should not have acupuncture?

Yes. You will not be given acupuncture if you:

1. have broken/ fragile/ infected skin or have an infection being treated by antibiotics
2. have a known metal allergy, specifically stainless steel
3. have a pacemaker/heart valve or other heart problem, or
4. have unstable epilepsy (and/or history of a recent seizure).

If you are pregnant then you will not be given acupuncture:

1. in the 1st trimester, because of the risk of miscarriage
2. if your blood pressure is high, because this may indicate pre-eclampsia
3. with recent or continuous vaginal bleeding, or
4. if your baby is moving less than normal.

Needling is also used with caution in some situations; you should tell your physiotherapist if you:

1. have a known problem with low blood pressure
2. have any condition where there may be a higher risk of infection, such as with a blood borne virus like hepatitis
3. have an auto-immune disease or have been prescribed medicine which lowers the immune system
4. you are a diabetic, as acupuncture may lower blood sugar
5. have haemophilia, or another blood clotting disorder
6. are taking blood-thinning medication such as anticoagulants
7. have a skin condition such as psoriasis, which may flare with treatment

8. are at all worried about acupuncture or are afraid of needles, or
9. have cold/flu symptoms or feel generally unwell, as another appointment can be arranged.

You should always ensure that you have eaten within 4 hours of treatment.

### **What exactly will happen when I come for acupuncture?**

Your physiotherapist will find out more about your condition by asking questions and carrying out a physical examination. You will have an opportunity to discuss physiotherapy treatment options, including acupuncture. If you are happy to proceed you will be asked to give your written consent.

You will then be asked to undress and be positioned on the bed or in a chair, to ensure that you will be comfortable for up to 20 minutes. Physiotherapists use sterile, single-use needles. The acupuncture point, usually found in a dip or dimple, is located. The skin is stretched and the needle is guided into the soft tissues, usually to a depth of . - ó inch. Needles will usually be inserted around the area where you feel pain, but some may be placed in your hands or feet, or in the unaffected side. At every visit you will be asked if you would still like to have acupuncture and if there are any reasons why you shouldn't.

### **How many treatments will I need?**

Treatments are normally given at 1-2 weekly intervals. Most patients receive a course of 4-6 treatments. If you have not noticed any improvement after 3-4 your physiotherapist may decide that you are unlikely to respond. Sometimes 1 or 2 'top up' treatments are required. Following discharge you will be able to assess any beneficial effects over the next few weeks and months.

### **What happens if I don't want acupuncture?**

If you don't want acupuncture your physiotherapist may offer you another type of treatment, which may include exercises, joint mobilisation/manipulation, muscle re-education, electrotherapy, or hydrotherapy.

For more information please contact the Therapy-First Physiotherapy

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