

Acupuncture

Patient information sheet

This information is provided to answer questions you may have about acupuncture and to see if it may be suitable for you.

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture has existed as part of traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years and is increasingly being included in general medicine as a complementary therapy (given alongside conventional treatment).

Acupuncture is a form of therapy in which fine needles are inserted into specific points of the body.

Acupuncture stimulates the nerves in the skin, muscle and other tissues, and can produce a variety of effects. It can increase the release of the bodies' natural painkillers, such as endorphin and serotonin, in the pathways of both the spinal cord and brain. This modifies the way pain signals are received by the brain.

It is believed that acupuncture can also have some psychological benefits, with some people often noticing an improved sense of well being after treatment.

What can acupuncture be used for?

Acupuncture is effective for a range of painful conditions and is commonly used to treat musculoskeletal pain, such as back and shoulder pain. It is also used to treat symptoms that can occur with some conditions such as:

- Pain
- Nausea
- Breathlessness
- Dry mouth

Could I have acupuncture?

It is important that your medical team agree that acupuncture is appropriate as this will be dependent on your current condition. Each person is different and will be assessed on individual need.

Are there any risks?

Acupuncture is generally safe, but you need to let the practitioner know if you have had any of the following:

- Fits, faints.
- Pacemaker or any other electrical implants.
- Bleeding disorder.
- Taking any anti-coagulants or any other medication.
- Have damaged heart valves or any other risk of infection.
- If you are pregnant.

Are there any side effects?

- Drowsiness can occur after treatment in some patients. Therefore if you have acupuncture in outpatient clinic it is advisable to bring someone with you who can drive you home.
- Minor bleeding or bruising can occur in about 3% of treatments.
- Pain during treatment can occur in about 1% of patients.
- Some symptoms can get worse after treatment (less than 3%). If this is the case please discuss with your practitioner.
- Fainting can occur in some patients.

If there are any risks that are particular to your case, your practitioner will discuss these with you.

Complications can occur during or after the treatment. Although very rare, potential complications of acupuncture include:

- Infection, although sterile, disposable needles are always used to prevent risk.
- Damage to an internal organ from the insertion of a needle.

Who can do or provide acupuncture?

Practitioners will practice acupuncture dependent on the level of training they have had. Acupuncture should only be used by trained practitioners who have undergone a period of training and are equipped to assess the risks and benefits of applying it.