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Sherwood Forest Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

A guide to acupuncture treatment

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information on acupuncture. Please speak to your therapist if you have any further questions.

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is used by physiotherapists to help with the management of pain and inflammation. Research shows acupuncture can 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). These chemicals help the body's healing processes and give pain relief before other treatments like exercise are started.

How is it done?

Fine, single-use sterile needles will be placed into various parts of the body while you are sitting comfortably in a chair or lying on a bed.

The needles will be placed close to the painful area or away from it; in some cases they will be placed on opposite sides of the body. The needles are normally left in place for about 10 to 30 minutes.

There are different types of acupuncture:

- Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which can be traced back as far as 1000BC and is based on energy flow.
- Western acupuncture, which is based on the release of chemicals in the nervous system. It also involves specific relaxation of muscles (trigger point acupuncture).

What does it feel like?

You may feel a slight pin prick as the needle goes into the skin. You may then feel an ache, tingling, warmth, or mild discomfort. This is a sign that the body is reacting to the acupuncture.

Will it work for me?

Acupuncture does not work for everybody and every condition but, frequently, good results are achieved when more general medicine has failed. Pain relief will build up as treatment progresses. Some people respond to treatment quite well, while others may see little benefit until they have had a few treatments; this is more common with a long term or chronic condition. Occasionally, the condition may become slightly worse at first. This is not necessarily a bad sign, as it usually means the condition will respond to the treatment.

Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is generally very safe because of strict hygiene guidelines. The needles are disposable, pre-sterilised and individually packaged; these are often supplied in guide tubes for easy insertion, which means there is no risk of anything touching the needle during the process.

Why a physiotherapist?

Physiotherapists are in a unique position of being able to combine acupuncture with other treatment methods such as exercise, manual therapy and relaxation techniques. Acupuncture has been chosen as a treatment alongside your other physiotherapy to aid your symptoms. We can only offer a short course of treatment, after which it would be up to you to continue with treatment privately if you wish.

When should acupuncture not be used?

Most people can have acupuncture therapy, but among the people who should avoid it are:

- People who have haemophilia
- Pregnant women, or women who are actively trying to get pregnant
- People who have a deficient or weakened immune system
- People who have a pacemaker, electrical implant, acute cardiac arrhythmias, congestive heart failure or any other heart problems
- People who take anticoagulants (blood thinning medication)
- People who have uncontrolled epilepsy.

When should acupuncture be used with caution?

The following conditions do not stop you from having acupuncture but should be used with care in:

- Diabetic patients (infection risk and slower healers)
- People who have HIV or hepatitis
- Cancer patients
- Stroke patients.

Does acupuncture have side effects?

Acupuncture is safer than many drug treatments, but occasionally it does have side effects. Some include:

- Drowsiness. This may occur during or after treatment; if you are affected we advise you not to drive. You may also find you sleep very heavily on the same night as your treatment.
- Minor bleeding or bruising. This occurs after acupuncture in about 3% of treatments.
- Pain. This occurs in about 1% of treatments.
- Existing symptoms getting worse after treatment. You should tell your physiotherapist about this; but this is usually a good sign.
- Fainting. This can occasionally occur in certain patients (5%), particularly at the first treatment. We advise you to not have acupuncture on an empty stomach.
- A collapsed lung (pneumothorax). Symptoms will include chest pain, shortness of breath and a cough, but can be either gradual or sudden. **Please see your GP or go to your nearest Emergency Department if you have these symptoms.**

We want you to feel comfortable about your treatment. If you have any concerns before or during your treatment, please discuss this with your therapist.

More information can be found on the Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists' website: www.aacp.org.uk

Further sources of information
NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions
Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)
PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222
Newark Hospital: 01636 685692
Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

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