

Acupuncture in Physiotherapy

Patient Information

Background

Acupuncture is a treatment we can offer as part of your physiotherapy management. It will usually be used alongside other treatments such as exercise.

What is acupuncture?


Acupuncture was developed as part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) over 2000 years ago and has been adapted for use in Western healthcare, mainly to manage pain. It works by stimulating the brain and spinal cord to produce natural pain-relieving chemicals, including endorphins (to relieve pain), melatonin (to promote sleep) and serotonin (to promote sensations of wellbeing).

What does acupuncture treatment involve?

Your physiotherapist will use sterile, single use fine needles. These are inserted through the skin. The points used will depend on the condition with which you are presenting. The needles are disposed of according to safe working policies. Acupuncture is not usually painful. For some people, needle insertion may feel like a mild pinprick. Once the needle is in place you may feel an ache or sensation of warmth around the needle site. Your physiotherapist may turn the needles to stimulate this effect further.

Needles may be placed locally to the problem, further away from the site of pain or even on the opposite side of the body. Commonly, treatments involve between 2-16 needles. The needles may be left in place for anything from a few seconds to 30 minutes. The benefit may be felt immediately or in the first few hours or days following treatment. The physiotherapist will assess the effectiveness at each session.

Working in partnership
Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
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How many treatments are needed?

You may notice an effect after the first treatment. Sometimes acupuncture works better after a few treatments. Wiltshire Health and Care's physiotherapists are able to offer three sessions of acupuncture on the NHS.

Is it a safe treatment?

All physiotherapists using acupuncture within Wiltshire Health and Care will have undergone a recognised training course. Physiotherapists are bound by rules of professional conduct and will only carry out treatment that they are competent to do. Physiotherapists will undergo continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure their practice remains relevant and competent. There are some potential problems with inserting needles into the body. Serious complications are extremely rare but include infection or damage to an internal organ.

Are there any reasons why acupuncture can't be offered?

Your physiotherapist will carry out a full assessment before acupuncture treatment is started. If any of the following may apply to you, please let your physiotherapist know as acupuncture may not be suitable.

Do not have acupuncture if you have any of the following:

- Sepsis
- Unexplained or unstable seizures
- Acute stroke
- Confusion
- Needle phobia

Needles should not be used on areas of your body where any of the following are present:

- Swelling
- Infection
- Tumour (especially spinal metastases)
- Uncontrolled movements
- Lymph node removal
- Spinal instability

The following conditions are considered to be precautions for acupuncture. You should make your physiotherapist aware if you have any of the following as they may need to factor this into your treatment planning:

- Pacemakers or electrical implants
- Blood borne viruses (eg, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, Hepatitis D, HIV or AIDS).
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Haemophilia or other blood clotting disorders
- If you are taking anticoagulants (blood thinning medication)
- Heart conditions, especially valvular heart disease (heart valve defects)
- Epilepsy or seizures
- Poor skin condition
- Circulation issues
- Allergies, particularly to nickel
- If you are pregnant or trying to conceive
- Infection
- A recent stroke or blood clot
- A deficient or weakened immune system

Please inform us of any changes to your health during your course of acupuncture treatment.

Are there any side effects?

Minor side effects that can occur include discomfort at needle site, drowsiness after treatment, bruising at the needle site, temporary pain increase, fainting or feeling faint. Please let your physiotherapist know if you experience any of these side effects.

Please ensure you have a light meal or snack and are well hydrated prior to your acupuncture treatment.

Please inform us if you are unwell with a cold or flu at the time of treatment - It is not advisable to have acupuncture when you are unwell, as it can exacerbate symptoms such as tiredness.

Further information

The contraindications and precautions were taken from the AACP 2021 Acupuncture guidelines which are available from [AACP Safety Guidelines 2021 online.pdf](#)

Useful website

www.aacp.org.uk

To contact the MSK Physiotherapy team within Wiltshire please visit;

<https://wiltshirehealthandcare.nhs.uk/physiotherapy/>

Safeguarding

Wiltshire Health and Care (WHC) are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, including victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We expect all WHC staff to share this commitment and promote safeguarding by implementing WHC policies and procedures, act promptly on concerns and share information appropriately.

If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and whc.pals@nhs.net

Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.