

Physiotherapy Department

Acupuncture – information for patients

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information on acupuncture and answer some of your questions.

Please speak to your physiotherapist if you have any further questions.

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture involves the insertion of fine needles into various parts of the body to stimulate or relax the body. There are different types of acupuncture:

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

Research supports the effectiveness of acupuncture for pain relief and it is therefore used by physiotherapists as part of a comprehensive treatment plan.

When should acupuncture not be used?

Even though acupuncture has been proven to be an effective tool for pain, it is not suitable for everyone. If you suffer from any of the conditions below then this is not a suitable treatment for you and you should speak to your physiotherapist:

- Metal allergies (specifically stainless steel).
- Needle phobia.
- You have a known infection or poor skin condition in the area to be treated.

When should it be used with caution?

It is also important that you inform your physiotherapist if you are affected by any of the following:

- Haemophilia.
- Are pregnant or trying to conceive.

- Suffer from epilepsy (seizures).
- Have a deficient or weakened immune system.
- Have a heart pacemaker.
- Taking anticoagulant (blood thinning medication).
- Diabetes.

These conditions do not exclude you from having acupuncture in most circumstances but they will influence your treatment.

Does acupuncture have side effects?

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

- Drowsiness after treatment (you are advised not to operate machinery or drive if this happens).
- Minor bleeding and bruising.
- Pain during and after treatment. Your physiotherapist will explain this.
- A temporary increase in your symptoms. This is often a sign that acupuncture is having a good effect. It is important to tell your physiotherapist about this before every session.
- Occasionally fainting or feeling faint.

All physiotherapists at Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust are AACP (Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists) trained and accredited.

What does acupuncture treatment involve?

Acupuncture is the insertion of needles into specific points of the body or around the body. The physiotherapist will select points that are:

- close to the painful area or away from it, for example hands and feet, and
- in some cases on opposite sides of the body.

The needles are sterile and disposable. You may feel a mild ache, numbness, warmth and heavy sensation as the needle is inserted. This is referred to as 'De Qi'. This is also a sign that the body is reacting to the acupuncture. The needles may be stimulated by a twisting motion at regular intervals throughout your treatment.

Treatment can be as little as a few minutes to 10-30 minutes. The number of needles may vary according to your condition and symptoms.

Number of treatments

The number of treatment sessions will also vary according to your condition but your physiotherapist will discuss this with you.

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. Our physiotherapists regularly update their skills and maintain a high level of acupuncture safety and standards.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your acupuncture, please contact your physiotherapist at **Guy's on 020 7188 5101** or **St. Thomas' on 020 7188 5095**, Monday to Friday, 8.30am – 4.30pm.

Out of hours, please contact your GP.

Use the space below to note any questions you may like to ask the physiotherapist:

Useful sources of information

Pharmacy medicines helpline – For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) – To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC) – For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

t: 020 7188 3416

Patient Transport Service – If you need to use our patient transport service, a member of our team needs to assess whether you are eligible. This involves a brief telephone interview and is completely confidential. Assessments must be carried out at least 48 hours before your appointment. If you think you may be eligible for this transport service, please contact the Patient Transport Assessment Team.

t: 020 7188 288

Language support services – If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Direct – Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 0845 4647 **w:** www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Choices – Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please call 0848 143 4017, email members@gstt.nhs.uk or visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk