Acupuncture

This leaflet gives information on acupuncture and will answer some of your questions. If you have any questions, please speak to your therapist.

What is acupuncture?
Acupuncture involves the insertion of fine needles into different parts of your 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 so it is used by therapists as part of a comprehensive treatment plan.

What does acupuncture treatment involve?
The therapist 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 positively to the acupuncture. The needles may be stimulated by a twisting motion at regular intervals throughout your treatment.

Treatment can last up to 30 minutes. The number of needles will vary depending on your condition and symptoms.

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 it is not a suitable treatment for you, and you should speak to your therapist:

- 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 tell your therapist 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
- are taking an anticoagulant (blood thinning medication)
- have diabetes.

Most of the time, these conditions do not stop you from having acupuncture, 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). It is recommended that you eat 2-4 hours before your treatment session to reduce possible drowsiness.
- minor bleeding and bruising.
- pain during and after treatment. Your therapist 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 therapist about this before every session.
- occasionally fainting or feeling faint.

**Number of treatments**

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

**Why a therapist?**

Therapists are in a unique position of being able to combine acupuncture with other treatment methods such as exercise, manual therapy and relaxation techniques. Our therapists 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**, t: 020 7188 5101, or **St. Thomas’**, t: 020 7188 5095, Monday to Friday, 8.30am-4.30pm. Out of hours, please contact your GP.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

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