W1Health

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ACUPUNCTURE INFORMATION LEAFLET

Some patients are a bit hesitant to try acupuncture, as they are nervous about needles or needle phobic. But many clients just do not know enough about acupuncture and so cannot make an informed decision about trying it as a treatment. This leaflet aims to answer the many questions that clients commonly ask with regards to acupuncture.

Will acupuncture hurt?

The answer to this question depends on many variables including the type of injury, the person's sensitivity and the style of acupuncture employed. On the whole, a slight sensation of discomfort can be experienced. If a tender point in the muscle is hit, then the muscle may "jump" or "twitch" and you will feel this. This muscle twitch is completely normal, it occurs because the needle has elicited a change in the affected tissue, and the tissue is acknowledging the contact made.

How does it work?

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), to name but a few. These chemicals assist the body's healing processes and offer pain relief as a precursor to other treatments such as manual therapy or exercise in order to aid recovery.

What will I feel afterwards?

In general, Acupuncture may make patients feel slightly drowsy/relaxed. This can occur during the session for the strong reactors, or later the same day. Some people may not experience it at all. This does not necessarily mean that Acupuncture won't work. Many patients sleep very heavily on the same night as their first treatment. Fainting can occur in certain patients, particularly in the first treatment. Existing symptoms can get worse after treatment fortunately this is rare (less than 3% of patients) and temporary. You should tell

your practitioner about this but it is usually a good sign. Pain during treatment occurs in about 1% of treatments. Minor bleeding or bruising occurs after Acupuncture in about 3% of treatments. Excessive drowsiness occurs after treatment in a small number of patients, and if affected you are advised not to drive.

N.B. If you experience any severe breathing difficulties or you collapse after receiving acupuncture treatment, then immediately contact your treating therapist, GP and/or local A&E department.

Is it safe?

Single-use, pre-sterilised, disposable, CE marked needles are only used. Serious side effects are rare e.g. Pneumothorax (0.0002%/less that 2 per 1 million).

Can I still donate blood if I have acupuncture?

Yes. Just inform your therapist and they can provide you with a letter if required.

Where does acupuncture come from?

Acupuncture forms part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). This ancient system of medicine dates back as far as 1000 years BC and is based on a holistic concept of treatment that regards ill health as a manifestation of imbalance in the body's energy. Re-establishing a correct balance is the aim of TCM. Energy is referred to as Qi, (pronounced chee) and is described in terms of Yin energy – quiet and calm and Yang energy –vigorous and exciting. They are complementary opposites and in health exist in a dynamic but balanced state in the body. Practitioners of TCM believe that stimulating certain Acupuncture points on the body can help to restore the balance between Yin and Yang that becomes disturbed in illness.

Is acupuncture not just a bunch of nonsense?

The research into acupuncture is on going and evolving. The scientific evidence base so far is robust enough, that National Institute for health and clinical excellence (NICE) has recommended the use of acupuncture in certain conditions.

I am scared of needles?

This is an understandable concern. Please bear in mind though that the acupuncture needle is significantly different in size, shape and structure to the (hypodermic) needle that is used when giving blood or receiving an injection. The acupuncture needle is smaller, thinner and does NOT have a hollow centre so feels very different to a standard medical syringe.

Is acupuncture better than other treatments?

All treatments have their advantages and disadvantages and acupuncture is no different. Acupuncture is, however, distinct in its ability to promote healing even once the needle has been removed. Like all treatments, acupuncture is not a panacea and tends to be used in conjunction with other therapies, like exercise.

Are there different styles of acupuncture?

Yes. There are different schools and styles of acupuncture and this influences the way in which acupuncture is delivered. Talk to your practitioner to find out more about their training.

STYLES OF ACUPUNCTURE

CONVENTIONAL ACUPUNCTURE involves the use of single-use, pre-sterilised disposable needles of varying widths, lengths and materials that pierce the skin at the acupuncture points. The Therapist will determine the locations of these points on the basis of an assessment. A number of needles may be used during each treatment, and these are typically left in position for between 20 and 30 minutes before being removed.

MYOFASCIAL DRY NEEDLING can be used to facilitate relaxation in specific muscles for longer-term unresolved muscle pain, muscle spasm, trauma or as a means of increasing muscle length in order to aid stretch and rehabilitation. In this style of acupuncture, the needle is inserted into the affected muscle until the tissue relaxes, it is then removed. Dry needling often produces an effect quickly, and therefore needles are usually kept in between 1-4minutes.

ELECTROACUPUNCTURE is applied following a detailed assessment. Inserted needles can be coupled to the electrodes of an electroacupuncture machine. These units are designed to deliver variable amplitudes and frequencies of electrical impulses. Low-frequency electroacupuncture is intended to contribute to the mechanism of pain reduction, especially by stimulating chemicals in the brain that aid analgesia, relaxation and sleep.

This technique is particularly useful in chronic pain problems and solid research to supports its use. Your Therapist may use transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) machines over specific acupuncture points in order to help this mechanism and enhance pain modulation.

Useful websites

The Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists: www.aacp.org.uk
The British Medical Acupuncture Society: www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk

References

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