

Pain Management Team: Chronic Pain Service

## Acupuncture

Information for Parents, Carers and Adolescents

### What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture treatment involves inserting very fine needles through the skin into 'key' points, known as acupuncture points, to stimulate or relax different parts of the body. Acupuncture is one of the most popular and well established complimentary therapies in the UK.

### How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture stimulates the nerves in the skin, muscle and other tissues, and can produce a variety of effects. We know that it increases the release of the body's natural painkillers, including endorphins and serotonin in the pathways of both the spinal cord and the brain, which then modifies the way pain signals are received in the brain.

### What conditions can acupuncture be used for?

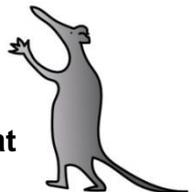
Acupuncture is proven to be effective in a wide range of painful conditions and is commonly used to treat non-specific joint pain; musculoskeletal pain; including chronic low back and neck pain; migraine and tension-type headaches; facial pain; dental pain and abdominal pain. In addition to pain it is also helpful for stress related illnesses, nausea and insomnia, which can also be problematic in people with chronic pain.

### What are the benefits of acupuncture?

Modern imaging techniques have demonstrated changes in brain activity – particularly those areas responsible for the processing of pain and suffering. However, acupuncture can do more than simply reduce pain; it can have a benefit on your general health. Patients often notice an improved sense of wellbeing after treatment. Current research shows that acupuncture can positively affect most of the body's systems.

### What does the treatment involve?

Treatment will be once per week to begin with, then possibly at longer intervals as the condition responds. A typical course of treatment lasts for six sessions. **It is important that you are committed to attend weekly appointments for six weeks.**



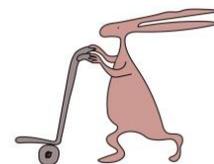
- Your acupuncture appointment will last one hour, during this time you will be assessed and examined by your nurse / physiotherapist and each treatment will be tailored to you. We will also look at your pain diary.
- The needles will then be inserted and left in position for up to 30 minutes, sometimes with manual (eg flicking or turning the needles) or electrical stimulation. Needles may be inserted close to or away from your painful area.
- The number of needles used varies, normally between six to ten needles are used, but it may be only two or three.
- Some people may feel dizzy when the needles are inserted, the needles also might produce a tingling sensation, dull ache, warmth, heavy sensation or no sensation at all.
- After the treatment you might feel drowsy or alternatively slightly elated.
- Occasionally pain relief starts straight away, many people gain some benefit after the next day or so. How long the pain relief lasts is variable from a few days, to never needing another treatment. Again, occasionally your symptoms might worsen for a few hours, but this is generally a good sign that you will respond well to treatment.

### Are there any contraindications against having acupuncture?

There are few contraindications (reasons that something cannot be used) to having acupuncture, which makes it is a very good therapy for most people.

Patients are unsuitable for acupuncture if they are:

- Unable to remain still for the length of treatment (up to 30 minutes)
- Unable to understand the procedure and give informed consent
- A patient with cancer who has had a surgical procedure involving removal of lymph nodes or those undergoing chemotherapy
- Taking anticoagulants (e.g. warfarin) or has a bleeding disorder
- Have damaged heart valves or have any other particular risk of infection
- Acutely fearful of needles
- Allergic to specific metals
- Pregnant
- Have a pacemaker



### Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is generally very safe. Acupuncture is already available in most adult hospital pain clinics and is provided by a growing number of regulated healthcare professionals in other settings both within the NHS and privately. Your acupuncture will only be performed by a practitioner accredited by either:

- The British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS),
- The British Acupuncture Council (BacC),
- The British Academy of Western Medical Acupuncture (BAWMA),
- The Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (AACP).

### Are there any side effects?

Treatments are used to make you better, but sometimes they cause problems we don't want - these are called side effects. Serious side effects are very rare – less than one per 10,000 treatments. Single-use, sterile, disposable needles are used.

You need to be aware that:

- Drowsiness can occur after treatment in a small number of patients
- Minor bleeding or bruising occurs after acupuncture in about 3% of treatments
- Pain during treatment occurs in 1% of treatments
- Existing symptoms can get worse after treatment (less than 3% of patients). You should tell your acupuncturist about this, but is usually a good sign
- Fainting can occur in certain patients, particularly at the first treatment. You should tell your acupuncturist if you have ever experienced a fit, faint or 'funny turn' before.

### Contact Details

Please contact the Pain Service via email if you have any questions.

[chronic.painteam@alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:chronic.painteam@alderhey.nhs.uk)

Anaesthesia office: 0151 252 5223

This leaflet only gives general information. You must always discuss the individual treatment of your child with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your child's treatment.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.

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