

# Acupuncture in physiotherapy

Department of Physiotherapy

Information for Patients

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## What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a form of ancient Chinese medicine. It is a physiotherapy mainly used for pain relief but can be used for muscle relaxation.

In acupuncture we insert fine needles into certain points on the body. We can use this to treat conditions like headaches. We will gently twirl or flick the needles to get a therapeutic response.

## How does acupuncture work?

We don't fully know why acupuncture works. When we insert the needle it stimulates the sensory nerves beneath the skin. This makes them release a hormone called endorphin. Endorphins relaxes the muscles and stops pain signals going to the brain.

Traditional eastern medicine believe that we have a type of energy called 'Qi' (pronounced 'chee') flowing through our bodies. When the body is sick this energy flow gets interrupted. Acupuncture and other treatments can help fix this.

## Will it hurt?

Acupuncture is not described as painful. You can feel a very brief sharp sensation like a pinprick as the needle goes through your skin. After that you may feel something different, like a heavy or dull sensation. This is not pain and how it feels can be different for each person. The therapist will ask you how you are feeling during the treatment.

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## Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is very safe. Serious side effects are very rare (less than 1 in 10,000 treatments).

There is a very small chance of infection after acupuncture. We use single use, sterile, disposable needles to reduce the risk of infection. Therapists wash and clean their hands both before and during treatment.

## Are there any side effects with acupuncture?

- You might feel sleepy or drowsy after treatment. Don't drive until you feel okay again.
- Minor bruising or bleeding after treatment happens in about 3% of treatments.
- Pain during treatment happens in about 1% of treatments.
- 3% of patients may feel worse before feeling better. This is usually a good sign and should only last a few days. Please tell your therapist of the symptoms you experience after treatment at your next visit.
- Fainting can happen to patients, particularly at the first treatment. This is rare. To make sure this does not happen your first session will be shorter.

## At your first treatment you will be asked to complete a consent form to let your therapist know if you:

- have ever had a fit, faint or funny turn.
- have a heart condition.
- have a pacemaker fitted or any other electrical implant.
- have a bleeding disorder.
- are taking medication to thin the blood (like warfarin or aspirin) or any other medication.
- are pregnant or trying for a baby.
- have a metal allergy or scared of needles (phobia).
- are at higher risk of getting an infection (if you are taking immune suppressant medication).

## How should I prepare for my first acupuncture treatment?

- Read this leaflet and follow any advice from your therapist. Ask if you are unsure about anything.
- You will need to sign a consent form.
- You might need to undress depending on which area is being treated. Wear clothing that allows easy access to the area.
- You will need to clean the area on your body that is being treated. It needs to be clean of

any sweat or dirt before you come.

- You will need to remove any makeup if you are having facial acupuncture.
- Please have something to eat 1 to 2 hours before attending your appointment. This is to reduce the chance of you feeling dizzy or light headed during treatment.

## Is there anything I should do after my appointment?

For acupuncture to have its full effect you are advised to rest after the treatment. If possible rest for the rest of the day.

Drink plenty of water.

If you are feeling a little dizzy or light headed, a snack and a rest should help.

## More information visit:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng193/chapter/Rationale-and-impact#acupuncture-for-chronic-primary-pain-2>

## Contact details

### Physiotherapy Departments:

Leicester Royal Infirmary	0116 258 5816
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