

Acupuncture in Podiatry

An information guide



Acupuncture in Podiatry

Acupuncture has been used in China for over three thousand years. Traditional belief is that energy flows freely throughout the body via channels. However, when there is a problem the energy stagnates.

Stimulation by acupuncture at various points helps to restore the healthy flow of energy in the body.

Acupuncture is one of a number of different types of treatment that your podiatrist may offer. It is viewed by podiatrists as a complementary, rather than as an alternative therapy.

When should it not be used?

There are certain circumstances where acupuncture should not be used, for example if you have:

- A needle phobia.
- A known metal allergy, specifically stainless steel.
- A known infection in the area to be treated by the needles.
- An unstable medical condition.
- Gross Pitting oedema.
- Patients about to drive or operate machinery.
- Eczema or Psoriasis at proposed needle site.
- Epileptic patients if their symptoms are not well controlled.

When should it be used with caution?

You should inform your podiatrist if you:

- Suffer from haemophilia.
- Are pregnant or trying to conceive.
- Suffer from epilepsy.
- Have a deficient/weakened immune system.
- Have a heart pacemaker.
- Are taking anticoagulant (blood thinning) medication.
- Have diabetes.
- Have reduced circulation to your legs and feet.
- Are diagnosed with any type of inflammatory joint disease e.g. rheumatoid arthritis or another connective tissue disease.
- Patients with oedema.

Your podiatrist needs to know if you have any of these conditions because you may not be suitable for acupuncture, or it may affect the way in which this treatment is given.

It is advisable to eat within the two hours before acupuncture.

Do not attend if you are suffering a severe cold or flu.

How does it work?

Acupuncture is seen as a number of treatments that modify the way the nervous system processes pain. It does so at several different levels which include:

- The local tissues.
- Spinal cord.
- The Brain.

What does acupuncture involve?

Treatment will consist of the insertion of fine needles.

These are pre-sterilised and single use, ensuring strict hygiene practice. The needle insertion will feel like a mild pinprick and should only give temporary discomfort. Once needles are in place you may feel a mild ache, numbness, or a warm or heavy sensation at or around the needle. This should not be unpleasant. This is referred to as “de qi” and it is a sign that the body’s inbuilt pain relieving mechanisms are being stimulated.

Your podiatrist may gently manipulate the needle until you experience the de qi. This may be repeated again throughout your treatment. Most commonly a treatment will involve the insertion of between two to ten needles. Needles can be in place from as little as a few seconds to a few minutes.

Initially you will be given 3 appointments at weekly intervals to assess your response to acupuncture.

Where will the needles be placed?

Needles may be inserted in legs and feet and maybe:

- Around the painful area.
- Away from the painful area.
- On the opposite side of the body.

Does acupuncture work?

Yes, but it does not work for all. Success can depend on a number of factors, which include:

- Your general health.
- The severity of the condition.
- The duration of the condition.
- How well controlled your condition is at the time of treatment.

Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is safer than many drug treatments used, however any procedure that involves inserting needles into the body is potentially associated with side effects and risks but these are usually minor. Your podiatrist will be fully trained in the management of a wide range of conditions. Podiatrists using acupuncture are required to train to a minimum standard and are bound by professional codes of conduct through the Society of Podiatrists and Chiropodists and the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Minor side effects:

- Some needle discomfort.
- Drowsiness and sleepiness following treatment (if this happens you should not drive until you feel alert).
- Bruising, pain, bleeding or irritation at the needle site.
- Temporary increase of initial symptoms.
- Fainting.
- Feeling faint or lightheaded.
- Small and temporary lowering of blood glucose levels in patients with diabetes.
- Euphoria (feeling of giddiness).
- Allergy.
- Sweating.
- Haematoma.
- Short term nerve damage.
- Arterial bleeding.

Serious side effects (these are very rare):

- Infection in the area where the needle was inserted.
- Infection which may infect previously damaged heart valves.
- Causing a wound to appear.
- Premature onset of labour in pregnancy.
- Having a fit – in people who have epilepsy.
- Anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction).
- Flare-ups of pre-existing psoriasis (skin condition).
- Long term nerve damage.

Risks (also rare):

Stuck needle – Which may need another needle to be inserted to ease removal

Broken needle – This would need emergency treatment via accident and emergency.

Seizure - Your GP would be informed if this occurs

Please be aware if you plan to donate blood following a course of acupuncture, you may be asked to provide written evidence that the course was carried out by a qualified Health Professional under sterile conditions. Please speak to your Podiatrist who can provide this if required.

Please read this leaflet carefully and if you have any questions please ask your podiatrist or contact the podiatry department on:

Fairfield General Hospital

0161 778 2860

Royal Oldham Hospital

0161 627 8014

If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service

Jeśli angielski nie jest twoim pierwszym językiem i potrzebujesz pomocy, skontaktuj się z działem tłumaczeń ustnych i pisemnych

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Dacă engleza nu este prima ta limbă și ai nevoie de ajutor, te rugăm să contactezi Serviciul de interpretare și traducere

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☎ : 0161 627 8770

@ : interpretation@pat.nhs.uk

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For enquiries regarding clinic appointments, clinical care and treatment please contact 0161 624 0420 and the Switchboard Operator will put you through to the correct department / service

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