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# Acupuncture Physiotherapy Department

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## Further Information

We endeavor to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email [pals@asph.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@asph.nhs.uk). If you remain concerned, PALS can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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## Undesirable side effects

There have been a few cases whereby acupuncture has produced some side effects. These side effects are very rare.

- Damage to an internal organ
- Infection in the area where the needle was inserted
- Infection from Hepatitis or HIV
- Infection which may infect previously damaged heart valves
- Premature onset of labour in pregnancy
- Pneumothorax
- Bleeding
- Needle shock nausea, sweating
- Needle grasp means that very occasionally one of the needles may be difficult to remove and occurs if the muscle surrounding it tightens. There are special techniques to remove these and the grasp may only last a short time.
- Broken needle
- If you have any concerns at all about your acupuncture treatment please communicate with your physiotherapist about it.

## What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture forms a part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and can be traced back 3,000 years. It is thought that energy (qi) flows through the body via channels (meridians) and when this process slows down pain is produced. Needles inserted into certain areas help to restore the energy flow and alleviate the pain associated with it.

Conventional acupuncture involves the use of fine needles of varying widths and lengths that pierce the skin at specific acupuncture points. Acupuncture can reduce pain by stimulating areas of the brain and spinal cord which produce natural pain-relieving chemicals such as endorphins, melatonin (which helps sleep) and serotonin (to promote well-being).

## What will it involve?

Acupuncture complements the wide range of treatment methods that Chartered Physiotherapists use. Treatment will consist of the insertion of fine needles. These are pre-sterilised and disposable, ensuring strict hygiene practice. The needle insertion will feel like a tap on the skin. Once the needles are inserted the physiotherapist will gently rotate each needle. This will be done until you feel a mild ache, numbness, or heaviness around the area being treated. This is known as 'De Qi' and means the pain relieving mechanisms are being stimulated. This may be repeated again throughout your treatment.

The amount of needles used may vary and the location of the needles is often in the area of pain. Additional needles are often used away from the site of the pain, known as distal points. These are included for a more effective treatment. It may be the case that needles are inserted completely away from the area of pain or on the opposite side to prevent aggravation of your symptoms. The time that the needles are left in may also vary with usual application for 10-30 minutes.

Acupuncture needles may be inserted into trigger points (tight sensitive areas in the muscles) to relieve pain and restore movement. This involves the same sterile technique.

#### **Adverse effects**

Due to the nature of inserting needles into a painful area of the body acupuncture may aggravate your symptoms. Do not be alarmed as this is likely to settle but it is important to let your physiotherapist know of your reaction to it.

Occasionally patients feel drowsy after acupuncture and you may need to wait to drive home. It may cause mild bleeding and a bruise may appear where the needle was inserted. It is important that **you eat something within 2 hours prior to having acupuncture** as it can cause blood sugars to lower which may cause the individual to faint. It is also advisable **not** to have treatment if you are suffering a **severe cold or flu** especially within the first 3 days .

#### **Is acupuncture safe?**

There are a few instances where acupuncture requires caution or should not be used. Therefore it is vital that you let your physiotherapist know if you have any of the following:

- Abnormal blood pressure
- A heart condition
- A metal allergy
- A needle phobia / anxiety about the procedure
- A pacemaker
- An infection in the area to be needled or any areas on the skin where the sensation is decreased.
- An open wound
- A bleeding disorder
- Any allergies
- Epilepsy
- Any blood borne infection (eg. Hepatitis B, HIV)
- Chronic fatigue
- Diabetes
- Anticoagulant tablets /or aspirin
- Steroid tablets
- Immune problems
- Pregnancy
- Fainting
- Recent stroke or CVA