

Acupuncture

How acupuncture works

Western medical acupuncture is the use of acupuncture following a medical diagnosis. It involves stimulating sensory nerves under the skin and in the muscles of the body. This results in the body producing natural substances, such as pain-relieving endorphins. It's likely that these naturally released substances are responsible for the beneficial effects experienced with acupuncture. A course of acupuncture usually creates longer lasting pain relief than when a single treatment is used.

Traditional acupuncture is based on the belief that an energy, or "life force", flows through the body in channels called meridians. This life force is known as Qi (pronounced "chee"). Practitioners who adhere to traditional beliefs about acupuncture believe that when Qi doesn't flow freely through the body, this can cause illness. They also believe acupuncture can restore the flow of Qi, and so restore health.

Uses of acupuncture

- Headaches and migraines
- Neck pain
- joint pain
- dental pain
- postoperative pain

How acupuncture is performed

An initial acupuncture session usually lasts 20 to 40 minutes and involves an assessment of your general health, medical history and a physical examination, followed by insertion of the acupuncture needles. Courses of treatment often involve up to 10 separate sessions, but this can vary.

In some cases, your practitioner may rotate the needles or stimulate them with a mild electric current (known as electroacupuncture).

When it's carried out by a qualified practitioner, acupuncture is generally very safe. Some people experience mild, short-lived side effects such as:

- pain where the needles puncture the skin
- bleeding or bruising where the needles puncture the skin
- drowsiness
- feeling sick
- feeling [dizzy or faint](#)
- worsening of pre-existing symptoms

If you have a bleeding disorder, such as [haemophilia](#), or are taking [anticoagulants](#), talk to your GP before you have acupuncture. Acupuncture is also not usually advised if you have a metal [allergy](#) or an infection in the area where needles may be inserted.

It's generally safe to have acupuncture when you're pregnant. However, let your acupuncture practitioner know if you're pregnant because certain acupuncture points can't be used safely during pregnancy.