

FAST FACTS: Acupuncture

Acupuncture is the insertion of very thin needles through the skin. Acupuncture is a key component of traditional Chinese medicine which is commonly used to treat pain. It is also used for overall wellness, including to manage stress. Traditional Chinese medicine explains acupuncture as a technique for balancing the flow of energy with the insertion of needles helping to rebalance the energy flow in the body. Western healthcare providers generally view acupuncture points as places to stimulate nerves, muscles, and connective tissue. Some believe this stimulation boosts the body's natural painkillers.

✓ Why it is done

Acupuncture is generally used to relieve pain or discomfort associated with the following examples:

- Nausea and vomiting associated with cancer chemotherapy or following surgery.
- Addiction
- Dental pain following surgery.
- Fibromyalgia
- Headaches, including migraines.
- Low back pain
- Neck pain
- Osteoarthritis
- Asthma
- Osteoarthritis
- May also help with stroke rehabilitation.



✓ Risks

- The risks of acupuncture are low with a certified acupuncture practitioner who uses sterile needles.
- Common side effects include soreness and minor bleeding or bruising at the site of needle insertion.
- Disposable needles used only once are the practice standard, so risk of infection is low.
- Before having acupuncture treatment, be sure to tell your family member's acupuncture provider if they have any of the following:
 - Bleeding disorder or taking blood thinners (this can increase the chances of bleeding or bruising)
 - If they have a pacemaker (one type of acupuncture that involves mild electrical pulse in the needles may interfere with the pacemaker).
 - Chronic skin problems
 - Breast or other implants

✓ What to expect

- Acupuncture may take up to 60 minutes, although some appointments may be shorter.
- Treatment for a single complaint typically includes one or two treatments a week.
- Number of treatments is generally 6-8 but depends on severity of condition being treated.

- The provider will insert very thin needles into specific spots on your family member's body. This generally causes very little discomfort.

✓ During Treatment

- Acupuncture points are all around the body. Sometimes the appropriate points are far removed from the area of pain.
- The provider will tell the patient the general site of the planned treatment and whether they need to remove any clothing.
- A gown, towel or sheet will be provided if needed.
- The patient will lie on a table for treatment, which involves:
 - **Needle insertion.** Acupuncture needles are inserted to various depths at strategic points on the body. Needles are very thin, so insertion usually causes little irritation. A typical treatment may use between 5 to 20 needles. The patient may feel a mild aching sensation when a needle reaches the correct depth.
 - **Needle manipulation.** Provider may gently move or twirl a needle after placement or apply heat or mild electrical pulses to the needle if part of the treatment plan.
 - **Needle removal.** Generally, needles remain in place for 10 to 15 minutes while the patient lies still. There is usually no discomfort when needles are removed.
- After treatment, some patients report feeling relaxed while others report they are energized.
- Acupuncture has few side effects, so if your family member is having issues with pain control it may be viable option to try. As always check with your family member's primary healthcare team before trying a new treatment.

✓ What Else You Should Do

- Write down and share information about your family member's pain prior to and following acupuncture treatment with their primary healthcare team.
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to your family member's healthcare providers.

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Resources

Johns Hopkins Medicine (2022) *Acupuncture*. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/acupuncture>.

Lenoir D, et al. Acupuncture versus sham acupuncture: a metaanalysis on evidence for longer-term effects of acupuncture in musculoskeletal disorders. *Clin J Pain* 2020; 36(7):533-49.

Mayo Clinic (2022). *Acupuncture*. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/acupuncture/about/pac-20392763>.