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Acupuncture

What Is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture is one of the many skills employed within physiotherapy as part of an integrated approach to the management of pain and inflammation. Physiotherapists base their treatments on scientific research and clinical evidence that Acupuncture can reduce pain by stimulating the brain and spinal cord to produce natural pain-relieving chemicals such as endorphins, melatonin (which promotes sleep) and serotonin (to promote well-being), to name but a few. These chemicals assist the body's healing processes and offer pain relief as a precursor to other treatments such as manual therapy or exercise in order to aid recovery.

Acupuncture forms part of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). This ancient system of medicine dates back as far as 1000 years BC and is based on a holistic concept of treatment which regards ill health as a manifestation of imbalance in the body's energy. Re-establishing a correct balance is the aim of TCM. Energy is referred to as Qi, (pronounced chee) and is described in terms of Yin energy – quiet and calm and Yang energy –vigorous and exciting. They are complementary opposites and in health exist in a dynamic but balanced state in the body. Practitioners of TCM believe that stimulating certain Acupuncture points on the body can help to restore the balance between Yin and Yang that becomes disturbed in illness.

Physiotherapists combine TCM principles with scientific evidence as a means of reducing pain and promoting healing, always with the aim of enhancing physiotherapy treatments such as exercise and rehabilitation techniques to promote recovery and improve quality of life.

There are several techniques for applying acupuncture and these are described below:

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Musculoskeletal, Sports Injuries Acupuncture & Women's Health

Conventional acupuncture

Conventional acupuncture involves the use of single-use, pre-sterilised disposable needles of varying widths, lengths and materials that pierce the skin at the acupuncture points. The physiotherapist will determine the locations of these points on the basis of an assessment of the cause of the imbalance. A number of needles may be used during each treatment, and these are typically left in position for between 20 and 30 minutes before being removed.

Trigger point acupuncture may also be used to facilitate relaxation in specific muscles following traumas, for longer-term unresolved muscle pain, or as a means of increasing muscle length in order to aid stretch and rehabilitation. In the latter case, the needle is inserted into the affected muscle until the tissue is felt to relax under the needle, which is then removed. Trigger point needling often produces an effect much more quickly, and therefore, does not require the 20–30-minute treatment time.

How Can Acupuncture Help Me?

The use of acupuncture needling for the treatment of pain is supported by an ever-growing body of scientific evidence.

Scientific research has examined the effectiveness of acupuncture for various conditions. In recent years large studies have begun to emerge which have helped to support the benefits of acupuncture treatment. For example it is accepted that acupuncture can help tension-type headaches and pain of osteoarthritis, for example osteoarthritis of the knee, especially when it is used in conjunction with other treatments such as physiotherapy.

Acupuncture combined with physiotherapy is widely accepted within both the National Health Service (NHS) and private practice. This is evident in the recommendation by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) that acupuncture should be available as a cost-effective short-term treatment for persistent non-specific low back pain (source: NICE 2009).

Acupuncture for Women's Health

Jenny Blizard and Kate Stower also specialise in Women's Health Physiotherapy having undertaken post-graduate training in physiotherapy and acupuncture. Conditions which are found to respond to acupuncture include:

- Bladder dysfunction including frequency, urgency and incontinence
- Pelvic pain including pain with intercourse
- During the menopausal period in particular for the treatment of hot flushes
- Regulation of the menstrual cycle and reduction in pre-menstrual syndrome

- Musculoskeletal pain during pregnancy

How do I book an appointment?

To book you will need to ask for an appointment with Matthew Newton, Kate Stower or Jenny Blizzard. On your first appointment we will need to take a detailed history and assess your problem to ensure that acupuncture is the best course of action. It might be that after an assessment, another form of physiotherapy treatment is preferential or indeed a combination of the two. It is advisable for your first appointment to book a 60 minute session. Future sessions are generally much shorter.

In addition to acupuncture for the management of a pain problem, Jenny and Kate also specialise in acupuncture in Women's health, so it is advisable to ask for Jenny or Kate at the time of booking if it is for a Women's health problem.

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