Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Acupuncture

This information explains the health benefits of acupuncture (AK-yoo-PUNK-cher). It also explains how to get acupuncture treatments at MSK.

Acupuncture is a treatment from traditional Chinese medicine. It's done by putting very thin needles into your skin at certain places on your body. These places are called acupoints (AK-yoo-poynts). Putting needles into these acupoints lets out natural chemicals in your body. They help with pain and other symptoms.

How acupuncture is done

Acupuncture is done by a licensed acupuncturist (AK-yoo-PUNK-cheh-rist). This is a person who has special training in acupuncture. During your treatment, you will lie on a padded table. Your acupuncturist places thin needles into your skin. The needle location depends on the problem being treated. Most people feel little or no pain.

Once the needles are in place, you will rest for about 30 minutes. Your acupuncturist will remove the needles at the end of your session. They are thrown away.

People have different experiences with acupuncture. Some people feel relaxed after their treatment. Others have more energy.

Benefits of acupuncture

Research studies show that acupuncture can help with some side effects of cancer and cancer treatment. This includes:

- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up).

- Vomiting (throwing up).
- Hot flashes.
- Trouble breathing.
- Fatigue (feeling very tired or having less energy than usual).
- Pain.
- Anxiety (strong feelings of worry or fear).
- Dry mouth.
- Nerve problems, such as:
  - Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN). CIPN is a nerve problem caused by chemotherapy and other drugs used to treat cancer.
  - Sciatica (nerve pain in your lower back).
  - Other neuropathic (nerve) pain.
- Joint disorders, such as osteoarthritis (OS-tee-oh-ar-THRY-tis). Osteoarthritis is a disease where the joint's cartilage wears down. Cartilage is the protective tissue at the ends of bones. Joint problems can lead to pain and swelling.

How to get acupuncture treatments at MSK

Acupuncture is a complementary therapy. Complementary therapies are treatments you can use along with your cancer treatments. They can help ease your symptoms. Call 646-449-1010 to schedule an acupuncture appointment.

To learn about other complementary therapies, call MSK's Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service at 646-449-1010 or visit www.msk.org/integrativemedicine.

Some health plans may cover acupuncture treatments under certain conditions. Call your insurance company for more information.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

About Acupuncture - Last updated on September 2, 2026

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