



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Acupuncture

This information describes the common uses of Acupuncture, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

According to TCM, acupuncture points are located at specific areas along channels or meridians. Qi (pronounced *chee*, meaning energy) is believed to flow in this network which connects different parts of the body. Pain and disease symptoms are thought to arise when Qi is not flowing. Acupuncture treatments are used to promote this flow and balance of Qi to relieve symptoms. It is also known to release pain-relieving or feel-good chemicals in the brain.

Studies in animals and humans have shown that acupuncture can stimulate pain relief and reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Other studies have shown it can improve sleep, increases blood flow, and may help reduce inflammation, which may also explain pain-relieving effects.

MRI studies show that acupuncture causes changes in the brain that reflect changes in the body. Other studies show that certain acupoints for dry mouth correlate to saliva production. Acupuncture also improves nerve signaling in patients with nerve pain.

Researchers are continuing to examine the mechanisms by which

acupuncture exerts these effects. Additional findings may help to optimize treatment regimens in the future.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **Cancer treatment symptoms**

Clinical trials support the use of acupuncture to relieve pain, nausea and vomiting, dry mouth, fatigue, hot flashes, and nerve pain resulting from cancer treatments. In some studies, benefits lasted well after treatment.

- **Pain**

Clinical trials demonstrate that acupuncture can help reduce pain, including joint or nerve pain associated with cancer treatments as well as other types of chronic pain.

- **Sleep**

Several trials in cancer patients show that acupuncture improves sleep.

- **Fatigue**

Several trials show that acupuncture reduces fatigue, including cancer-related fatigue.

- **Anxiety**

Several studies show that acupressure and acupuncture can help relieve anxiety related to tests and procedures. It may also help with anxiety in general.

- **Nausea and vomiting**

Acupuncture can reduce chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting.

- **Constipation**

Some evidence suggests acupuncture may help relieve constipation.

What are the side effects?

Acupuncture is generally safe when performed by trained practitioners. Some conditions require continuous treatments in order to achieve long-term effects.

Pregnant women, patients who wear pacemakers, and those with [lymphedema](#) or [low platelet count](#) should inform their practitioners before receiving treatment.

What else do I need to know?

What Is It:

Acupuncture is a therapeutic component of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Treatment involves the use of very thin needles along with heat, pressure, or electricity to stimulate points on the body, promoting the flow and balance of internal energy.

Acupuncture treatment can help reduce

- Pain
- Fatigue
- Hot flashes

It can also help improve

- Sleep
- Dry mouth
- Nausea and vomiting

Cancer guidelines recommend acupuncture as part of management for cancer pain, fatigue, and hot flashes. Further, a newly released guideline from the Society for Integrative Oncology and ASCO recommends acupuncture for aromatase inhibitor-related joint pain, musculoskeletal pain, and general cancer pain.

Cancer patients considering acupuncture should seek certified or state-licensed practitioners who have training or experience in working with cancer patients. Some oncology physicians may also be board-certified acupuncturists.

The [Integrative Medicine Service](#) at MSK offers acupuncture and [other integrative therapies](#) to support the recovery and wellbeing of cancer patients. In addition, [clinical trials](#) continue to evaluate acupuncture for patients with cancer.

Who Can Provide this Service:

Cancer patients considering acupuncture should seek certified or state-licensed practitioners who have training or experience in working with this population. Some oncology physicians may also be board-certified acupuncturists.

Where Can I Get Treatment:

A majority of National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers offer acupuncture as part of supportive care.

The [Integrative Medicine Service](#) at MSK offers acupuncture and [other integrative therapies](#) to support the recovery and wellbeing of cancer patients.

[Clinical trials](#) continue to evaluate acupuncture for patients with cancer.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

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

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