

Acupuncture Referral Guidelines

Referral guidelines for acupuncture:

The following is a list of conditions, diagnoses and symptoms for which acupuncture treatment can be used. The categories are placed roughly in order of response rate, starting with the highest.

Primary myofascial pain

Pain from skeletal muscle; localised tender knot of muscle, often with wide pain referral pattern; frequently affects neck, shoulder girdle and hip girdle; responds very well to direct trigger point needling.

Commonly presents as (not in order of frequency):

- tension headaches
- atypical facial pain
- dental pain in the absence of local decay
- atypical chest pain
- cervical radiculopathy without loss of power or reflexes
- shoulder pain
- chronic abdominal pain
- dorsal or low back pain (more often unilateral than central)
- sciatica without loss of power or reflexes
- trochanteric bursitis
- anterior knee pain
- calf pain
- metatarsalgia, etc.

Nociceptive musculoskeletal pain

- osteoarthritis (especially knee, ankle, acromio-clavicular joint & cervical spine)
- enthesopathies (achilles tendonitis, lateral & medial epicondylitis)

Functional, recurrent & other disorders

- irritable bladder symptoms (nocturia, frequency & urgency)
- irritable bowel syndrome
- migraine headaches
- dry eyes and xerostomia
- menstrual & menopausal symptoms (especially hot flushes)

Allergies

Hayfever, allergic rhinitis, some forms of urticaria.

Skin

Local acupuncture needling can be useful in the treatment of discrete rashes and ulceration. Generalised chronic skin diseases do not respond convincingly, although those with an allergic component (some forms of eczema) may do well. Acupuncture seems to be effective in the treatment of itch.

Depression

Studies suggest electroacupuncture is as effective as tricyclic antidepressants.

Fibromyalgia

One high quality randomised controlled trial found a specific effect of electroacupuncture in fibromyalgia. In practice this condition is not easy to treat, but associated myofascial pain often responds well.

Neuropathic pain

Neuropathic pain is difficult to treat. Acupuncture will occasionally have dramatic effects, but often will do nothing for these conditions.

- trigeminal neuralgia,
- brachial plexus neuropathies
- post-laminectomy syndromes (often mixed aetiology, can do well)

- phantom limb pain
- other neuralgias and neuropathies

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME)

Acupuncture is useful for treating the muscular pains commonly complained of by ME sufferers, but it does not appear to affect the condition itself.

Treatment for addictions and smoking

Acupuncture has been used in the treatment of addictions since a chance observation in the early 1970s that it modified the withdrawal symptoms in opiate addicts. Clinical research has yet to confirm whether or not acupuncture is useful in the management of withdrawal from addictive substances.

Acupuncture treatment for smoking cessation can be performed at the London Teaching Clinic. Management of withdrawal from other addictive substances is not undertaken at the clinic.

Acupuncture for weight loss

Clinical research has yet to confirm whether or not acupuncture is useful in the management of weight loss. A trial of acupuncture treatment for weight loss can be performed at the London Teaching Clinic. A short course of treatment is aimed at appetite suppression. Lifestyle modification is necessary to maintain any weight loss achieved.

Multiple Sclerosis

There is no reason to believe that acupuncture can affect the progression of multiple sclerosis.