

Modern imaging techniques have demonstrated changes in brain activity – particularly those areas responsible for the processing of pain and suffering.

As we learn more about it, the possibilities of using acupuncture alongside orthodox medicine increase. It is already available in most hospital pain clinics and is provided by a growing number of regulated healthcare professionals in other settings.

Where to go for acupuncture

Acupuncture is a potent therapy and, whilst it is generally safer than most conventional treatments, if used without due care it can have adverse effects or interactions with other treatments. Acupuncture should only be used by trained practitioners who are equipped to assess the risks and benefits of applying it.

The British Medical Acupuncture Society promotes the use of acupuncture within orthodox medicine, as one of a range of therapies for treatment of defined medical conditions.

All members of the British Medical Acupuncture Society are registered healthcare professionals with orthodox training in Western medical practices, who have undergone recognised acupuncture training. Members are subject to the Society's Code of Practice and Complaints Procedure in addition to statutory regulation within their primary profession.

Your family doctor may be able to tell you the name of your nearest medical acupuncturist. Alternatively, the British Medical Acupuncture Society administration office can provide contact details of your nearest BMAS accredited medical acupuncturist:



The British Medical Acupuncture Society
BMAS House, 3 Winnington Court,
Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1AQ
Telephone: 01606 786782
Email: admin@medical-acupuncture.org.uk

If you live or work in or within reach of central London, the BMAS London Teaching Clinic at the Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital may be able to offer you treatment. For further details or to make an appointment contact the Society's London office:



The British Medical Acupuncture Society
Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital,
60 Great Ormond Street, London WC1N 3HR
Telephone: 020 7713 9437 or
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British Medical Acupuncture Society
Patient Information Leaflet

Responsible Acupuncture

During the past few years acupuncture has become increasingly popular. Whilst it is exciting that the range of medical applications of acupuncture is increasing, it does mean that the responsible practitioner of acupuncture has a duty to inform both other colleagues and the general public about the strengths and weaknesses of the technique.

Ambitious claims have been made of acupuncture in the past, and not all of these claims have been substantiated. This has resulted in some continued scepticism within the healthcare environment. Acupuncture can be an effective method of treatment for certain conditions, and it can have wide ranging beneficial effects in some patients. Therein lies the problem: it is important to be clear about the potential benefits, but since acupuncture works through harnessing some of the body's own pain relieving and repair mechanisms, there is a substantial degree of variation in the response of different individuals.

The British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS) is a nationwide group of healthcare professionals who practise acupuncture alongside more conventional techniques. The Society believes that acupuncture has an important role to play in healthcare today, and that it is vital to present a balanced view in order that practitioners and patients may make informed decisions about its use.

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a treatment that can relieve symptoms of some physical and psychological conditions and may encourage the patient's body to heal and repair itself, if it is able to do so.

Acupuncture stimulates the nerves in skin, muscle and other tissues, and can produce a variety of effects. We know that it increases the release of the body's natural painkillers, including endorphin and serotonin, in the pathways of both the spinal cord and the brain. This modifies the way pain signals are received by the brain.

Acupuncture can do more than simply reduce pain however: it seems to have a beneficial effect on the health of some individuals. Patients often notice an improved sense of wellbeing after treatment.

Current research shows that acupuncture can affect most of the body's systems – the nervous system, muscle tone, hormone production, circulation, and allergic responses, as well as the respiratory, digestive, urinary and reproductive systems.

Each patient's case is assessed by the practitioner and treatment tailored to the individual, but a typical treatment involves fine needles being inserted through the skin and left in position briefly, sometimes with manual or electrical stimulation. The number of needles varies but may be only two or three. Treatment might be once a week to begin with, then at longer intervals as the condition responds. A typical course of treatment lasts five to eight sessions.

What sort of conditions respond to acupuncture?

Acupuncture is effective in a wide range of painful conditions and is commonly used to treat musculoskeletal pain, for example in the back, neck, shoulder and leg. It has been used successfully in the treatment of headache, migraine, 'trapped nerves', chronic muscle strain, sports injuries and various kinds of rheumatic and arthritic pain.

Some other situations in which acupuncture might be used are:

- Functional bowel or bladder problems such as IBS or irritable bladder, sometimes mild forms of urinary incontinence
- Menstrual and menopausal symptoms
- Allergies such as hayfever and perennial allergic rhinitis, and some allergic rashes such as urticaria or prickly heat

- Some other skin problems such as discrete rashes and ulcers, pruritus (itching), some forms of dermatitis and some of excessive sweating
- Sinus problems and chronic catarrh
- Dry mouth and eyes
- Stopping smoking

Clinical research has yet to confirm whether or not acupuncture is useful in the management of weight loss. Acupuncture may be helpful in the suppression of appetite, but lifestyle modification would be necessary to maintain any weight loss achieved.

The conditions above are not an exhaustive list and many other conditions have been treated with acupuncture. Before starting a course of acupuncture the practitioner must be sure that all the necessary tests have been carried out with might point to any serious or potentially serious condition which may require other forms of treatment.

Acupuncture – today and tomorrow

Techniques resembling acupuncture have been used for over 5000 years. A comprehensive system was developed in the Far East and this was first introduced into Europe in the 17th century. However, widespread interest in the technique did not develop until the political events of the 1970s allowed travel restrictions between East and West to be eased.

Because of increasing public interest in the subject over the last thirty or forty years, considerable scientific research has been carried out, though much remains to be done. We now know much more about how acupuncture works and some of the myths about it can be laid to rest. It is demonstrably untrue to say that the effects of acupuncture are all in the mind.

