

# Acupuncture



## A Patient Guide to Acupuncture at VA Butler Healthcare

### What Is Acupuncture?

*This medical intervention originated in China and has been practiced continuously for over 3,000 years.*

Acupuncture refers to solid stainless steel, hair-thin needles inserted through the skin and moved by hand or electrical stimulation. Needles are inserted into defined locations, painful areas, and tight muscles.

A typical acupuncture treatment can use as many as 30 needles depending on the symptoms and their severity. Typically, you will be seated, lying face down or up. The number of treatments is highly individualized and it can take several visits to determine your response.

### What Does Acupuncture Feel Like?

Occasionally you will feel a small prick as the acupuncture needle is inserted through the skin. Most patients do not report pain, since the needles are as thin as a human hair.

Once the needle is inserted, a patient may feel one of several desired and predictable sensations such as heaviness, warmth, a dull ache, numbness, or even a twitch. No lasting sharp pain should occur. The needles are retained for 15-30 minutes and may be occasionally moved.

### Why Acupuncture?

Acupuncture is used mainly to relieve discomfort associated with a variety of diseases and conditions.

When inserted, an acupuncture needle interacts with skin receptors (*skin receptors detect pressure, temperature, and vibrations on or around the skin*) and controls pain signal transmission (*affecting what pain information is sent to the brain*).

Studies have shown acupuncture stimulates specific areas of the brain that relate to pain, emotion, and memory. For example, acupuncture is understood to activate the release of endogenous opioids (natural painkillers) from an area of the brain known as the periaqueductal gray. In addition to natural pain killers, endorphin, dynorphin and enkephalin, acupuncture treatments also stimulate the release of serotonin and dopamine (our happy/positive chemicals).

### Acupuncture Safety

Acupuncture is considered safe when well-trained and experienced practitioners are using sterile, single-use needles. Serious complications are very rare. The most common negative responses to care are bruising or bleeding upon needle removal and temporary pain at needle insertion site. It is not uncommon for some individuals to feel nauseous or dizzy at the onset of their first acupuncture treatment due to fear of needles and anxiousness.

### How Do You Prepare For Acupuncture?

Wear loose clothing, but be prepared to wear a gown if the acupuncture points are difficult to access. Do not consume alcohol prior to your visit. Unless otherwise directed by your VA doctor, you may take your normally scheduled medications and may eat or drink prior to the appointment.

The first acupuncture appointment will be an hour long and you will be able to resume all normal activities – including driving – upon completing your appointment.

A VA doctor will take a detailed history, evaluate the area of complaint, and determine an appropriate care plan. You should alert your doctor if you have a pacemaker or implanted electrical device, or suffer from seizures or syncope.

### Conditions Acupuncture May Help Treat

- Chronic pain (pain more than 3 months)
- Low Back Pain
- Neck Pain
- Headache/Migraine
- Arm/Wrist Pain
- Hip/Leg Pain
- Neuropathy (nerve damage)

### How To Make An Appointment

Talk to your doctor at VA Butler Healthcare. Your VA doctor will determine if acupuncture is a good choice for you. If you have any additional questions about acupuncture, please talk to your health care team.