

How to make the most out of your acupuncture treatment

Prior to your appointment

Schedule your visit wisely

Avoid scheduling acupuncture before or after something really strenuous. It is not that you have to be sedentary before or after an appointment, but you shouldn't be going extreme at the gym or suffering through an extremely stressful meeting either. Also avoid squeezing in acupuncture immediately between two other events— this has a tendency to make you either late for or stressed out during your treatment.

Allow yourself one hour or so for your treatment time. This is the time for you to address any concerns and once on the treatment table to regain a most needed balancing.

Eating

This is an important issue. Everyone metabolizes food at different rates, so adjust as you see fit, but a good guideline is to eat about two hours before an acupuncture appointment. You don't want to show up really full, or after having eaten something heavy, fried or spicy, but do not go for acupuncture on an empty stomach. It can leave you feeling lightheaded or physically depleted. If you're debating whether it's too close to your appointment to eat, eat. Better to be a little full than distracted by hunger during your appointment.

Avoid coffee

Coffee is not good immediately before acupuncture. If you have a morning appointment and can't go without your morning cup, do what you have to do. But if you're going for acupuncture later in the day, avoid coffee for at least two hours before.

Coffee is a stimulant. It has been shown to release norepinephrine and epinephrine, which kick your body into fight or flight mode. Acupuncture works to shift you away from that sympathetic (fight or flight) state towards the parasympathetic (rest and digest) one, so coffee interfere and inhibits this process. It also makes it difficult for the acupuncturist to get accurate readings on your pulse and tongue, since coffee increases your heart rate and stains your tongue.

Avoid alcohol

One of acupuncture's greatest gifts is its ability to help us see more clearly, it helps us see situations and our symptoms with more clarity. Alcohol does the opposite. It numbs us, takes the edge off, which during acupuncture is not a good thing. One goal of acupuncture is to bring more awareness to how we feel. Impairing the senses with alcohol is not helpful.

Remember where you have been

Before your acupuncture appointment, spend some time thinking about or even making a list of any significant medical events in your life. For example, family disease history, car accidents, broken bones, other serious injuries, long-term illnesses, surgeries, etc. Also make note of any medications you are taking currently as well as any that you took long-term in the past.

We tend to forget these things, or assume they're irrelevant, but from an acupuncture perspective they help contribute to your overall picture of health. When in doubt about whether to include something, it's always better to mention it.

Wear loose clothing

This will help the acupuncturist to easily access the places where he or she wants to place needles.

Do not rush

Even when we schedule wisely, there is still a tendency to leave at the last minute for appointments. This makes most appointments more stressful than they need to be. When you rush into an appointment, your pulse is higher than normal, your mind is spinning, and you're tense with worry about the prospect of being late.

Many of us already deal with these qualities during our regular stress-filled days—and they're often the reasons for coming to acupuncture in the first place, so why make them worse by rushing? Also arrive fifteen minutes prior to your appointment time.

Turn off your cellphone

Last but not least, please turn off your phone. Not on vibrate. Off. Do it before your appointment actually starts, to avoid forgetting and/or getting distracted by a call or message immediately before you're about to begin. This is your time and no one else's. Make it count.

Some of these things are easy to forget. Create a pre-acupuncture checklist, something you can glance at on the days you have acupuncture, once first thing in the morning and again just before your appointment.

Following your acupuncture treatment

People often wonder what they should and should not do after an acupuncture treatment.

Acupuncture gets things moving and effects releasing, potentially causing your body to react in ways that it's not used to. You should and want to value that experience by giving yourself time to see how things shake out.

Rest

You don't have to literally lie down or take a nap. Resting allows the physical and emotional restoration that acupuncture sets in motion to continue.

Avoid strenuous

A lot of people ask whether they can work out after acupuncture. Exercise is fine—light, gradual movement can be a nice adjunct to an acupuncture treatment—but be gentle and avoid strenuous activities.

Use heat

One of the most common questions people who are going to acupuncture for pain relief is, “should I use heat or ice?” Heat is the answer most of the time. From an acupuncture perspective, many pain conditions are caused by stagnation. Things are not moving smoothly through the channels, causing blockages that lead to pain. Acupuncture restores flow, helping to eliminate these blockages. Looking at pain from this perspective, ice is counterproductive; it causes things to remain stagnant and slows down the healing process. After acupuncture, choose heat.

Avoid alcohol and coffee

1) It's important to stay hydrated after acupuncture because it can cause toxins to be released into your system. Staying appropriately hydrated helps flush out these toxins. Since alcohol and coffee both cause dehydrating effects on the body, they should be avoided after acupuncture.

2) Alcohol and coffee mess with your bodily awareness. One of the main goals of acupuncture is to bring greater clarity and awareness to how we really feel. Since alcohol impairs the senses, and coffee falsely heightens them, both can potentially counteract or mask the effects of acupuncture.

You might want to steer clear for a day or two after acupuncture.

Turn off the TV

Acupuncture helps bring you into a place of balance, where your sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight response) is no longer in overdrive. Your mind is calmer and clearer, enjoying a respite from the over stimulating world in which we live. As soon as you click on that TV, it all comes flooding back - incessant advertising, screaming pundits, news flashes, noise and more noise. Keep the TV off and you will prolong your state of “acu-bliss”.

Eat good food

Acupuncture helps bring the toxins out. Do not knowingly put them back in by eating poor-quality food. Avoid processed foods and Sugar. Think about food as sustenance, and eating as an opportunity to continue healing your body after acupuncture. When we conceive of food in this way, fast food and other junk become less appealing. After acupuncture, imagine the foods that would make you feel nourished and healthy and then eat them.

Fatigue

People can feel wiped out after acupuncture. A more common result is increased energy, but sometimes the “*acu land*” effect hangs on a little longer. This is your body telling you that it’s depleted. Feeling fatigued after acupuncture is not cause for concern, but it is a warning sign that you need to rest.

If you have this experience, take it easy for the remainder of the day. Take a bath that night. Go to bed early. The next morning, the combination of acupuncture and rest will leave you feeling born again.

Soreness

Body parts where acupuncture needles get inserted can feel sore after needles are removed and most commonly occurs with points in the hands and feet. You also may experience muscle soreness away from the needling site if a trigger or ashi point was released during your treatment.

Soreness from acupuncture typically dissipates within 24 hours. However, big trigger point releases can cause residual soreness that lasts a few days.

Bruising

Although less common than soreness, bruising can occur at the needling site. Sometimes bruising is the result of a hematoma, a localized collection of blood that gets initiated when the needle punctures the skin. Bruises, unfortunately, usually last longer than soreness from an acupuncture needle. Still, they generally are not anything to worry about beyond the aesthetic inconvenience.

It is unknown why some people bruise from acupuncture. There are some patients who, no matter what we try in terms of needle brand, size or technique, bruise every time, but the majority never experience bruising anywhere.

Muscle twitching

People may experience involuntary muscle twitching during or after acupuncture. It usually occurs in muscles that receive acupuncture needles and also on seemingly random parts of the body that are far away from any needles.

The acupuncture experience

Acupuncture is a very safe practice and most of the times exempt from major complications. The most common side effects of acupuncture are things everyone wants: better sleep, more energy, mental clarity, better digestion and less stress and one or several of these side effects occur routinely for many of those receiving acupuncture treatment.

There are other less-pleasant side effects of acupuncture, although these additional side effects are much rare but they can and do occasionally happen.

None are life-threatening, and all typically are short-lived. Still, they are good to be aware of so that if you do experience them, you know they're normal and nothing to be too concerned about.

The following is a list of those less common side effects associated with acupuncture:

Worsening of symptoms

While most people notice a marked improvement in their symptoms following acupuncture, some feel worse before they start feeling better. In natural medicine circles, this is sometimes referred to as a *healing crisis*. The idea is that as your body starts undergoing the changes involved in moving toward health, things get stirred up. This can cause not only an exacerbation of current symptoms but also the recurrence of previous ailments that had been dormant.

Acupuncture awakens your self-healing capabilities and with that can come an onslaught of bodily sentience. This usually is a positive experience but it also can mean heightened sensitivity or intolerance for things that previously felt normal. An example of this is someone who unconsciously adapts to stress by tightening and hunching up his shoulders. After an acupuncture treatment, once this person's bodily felt sense has been woken up, his mild upper back and neck tension might start screaming.

The good news about this side effect is that it's a sign that things are moving. In the case of acupuncture, this means that the primary objective is being met. That is, you are starting to transition on multiple levels from stuck to unstuck.

Muscle twitching is different from full-on muscle spasm. If during or after an acupuncture treatment you feel that one of your muscles is acutely spasming, especially if it's a muscle that was just needled, please let us know. We might be able to release it before you go on your merry way.

Lightheadedness

Although infrequent, it can happen — and on very rare occasions, post-acupuncture lightheadedness can result in fainting. Getting up quickly from the acupuncture table can cause lightheadedness, as can coming for acupuncture on an empty stomach. Remember that eating is one of the key things to remember before an acupuncture appointment.

When your acupuncture session is over, take your time getting up and move gently as you gather your things to leave. If you find yourself feeling lightheaded after the treatment, sit in the waiting room for a few minutes and take some deep breaths. Acupuncture can be a physically and emotionally intense experience, and sometimes our bodies are not fully recovered at exactly the moment our hour is up. It is okay if you need a little extra time.

Emotional release

Sometimes people cry in acupuncture. Not because they're in pain, but because their emotions, which can get stifled while powering through life, become free-flowing. The emotional release that can happen in acupuncture usually is a positive experience, but it can be surprising, especially for people who tend to be more emotionally stoical.

Feeling extra sensitive or tear-prone in an acupuncture session, or even in the days that follow, is completely normal. It is also a sign that the acupuncture treatment is working.

Even if you're seeking acupuncture for a physical ailment, increased emotional expression is an indication that healing is happening. From an acupuncture perspective, physical and emotional health is interconnected, so emotional shifts suggest forthcoming physical changes as well.

While these side effects are rarely a cause for concern, you know your body best. If any of the above side effects feel like they're too severe or lasting too long — or if you notice any additional negative reactions to an acupuncture treatment — you should contact us.

Expected results from acupuncture

Most patients that visit the acupuncture clinic and seek acupuncture treatment, or are referred by their PCP to the acupuncturist, have already exhausted many other therapeutic venues to resolved their condition (s), enduring years of pain both, physical and emotional, as well as other ailments and unfortunately Chinese Medicine is seeing as the last resort.

People with chronic issues are desperate and sometimes they are looking for a miracle, but reality is that Chinese Medicine is far from being that, but a well-founded medical system with a holistic and integral approach of each individual and based its results in a total systemic balance that requires a consistency in the treatment and an active involvement of the individual in such treatment in order to restore the constitutional balance and promote healing if not, making the condition more manageable.

Then the question is, “how many treatments are there”, and the answer is not a clear cut one approach fit all. Each patient is different and is treated that way and the responses to treatment vary widely.

As a rule of thumb acute and short term issues will experience a quick resolution; long term/chronic issues and depending on the cause are difficult to predict as each case is approached individually.

The following are a clear and balanced way to approach the acupuncture treatment with the goal of achieving maximal and permanent results.

Frequency of treatment

A treatment once a week will render marginal results: you may get results during your first session, you may feel 70 — 80 % or even 95 - 100% better, but this is a short term improvement that may last hours, a few days, a month, it is actually unpredictable how soon you will regain the status prior to your current condition (s); with this approach long term results are questionable and treatments lengthier.

Your body follows natural cycles that take place every five days, either if you are aware or not and in acupuncture we take advantage of that and try to induce balance that will be recognized by your body and adjust accordingly.

If you want your life back, if you want to see most of your issues improved, two to three treatments a week is the ideal scenario that will ensure a better clinical results.

Assessing the results

As a general guide, ten sessions equal one treatment. By the 10th treatment you should have improved between 30 to 50%; if this is not the case you may consider:

1. Discussing with your acupuncturist your results and decide the next plan/options
2. Go from once a week to two or three, and then once an 80 or 90% is achieved then go back to once a week.

After two weeks with no pain or manageable/tolerable discomfort, what we call a 100% improvement; allow you two more weeks of treatment, which would be four weeks at a 100% of improvement. Once we have achieved this level of clinical improvement you may want to come once a month for four or five more months, and even considering an scheduled maintenance.

The aforementioned protocol is a general approach to pain and other chronic conditions when treated solely by acupuncture; in some instances other therapies are added for instance, Chinese herbs which by itself has to be considered from a different perspective.