

Dental Acupuncture Fact Sheet

Acupuncture is a medical treatment that has evolved over thousands of years. It has taken much of its traditional core concepts from traditional Chinese medicine. Over the more recent past there has been much interest within Western Medicine in the way acupuncture actually works and how it might help you. As a result, a wide range of western medically trained practitioners, from anaesthetists to physiotherapists to dentists now use acupuncture as part of their overall management and treatment plans for patients. Despite differences in the underlying concepts and theories for the mechanisms of action of acupuncture, the aims are the same - to reduce symptoms.

The most essential part of the process, is your diagnosis as this allows us to plan the best treatment for you. As a patient, therefore, you must be prepared for a number of questions and potentially investigations to help establish the diagnosis for your symptoms before commencing treatment.

For many conditions, acupuncture can provide a very good outcome, with the result of improving or eliminating symptoms.

Conditions that are most amenable to acupuncture appear to be musculoskeletal conditions i.e. conditions of joints and muscles.

What does it involve?

- Acupuncture treatment involves the insertion of fine needles into the body.
- For most dental treatments generally these will be in the head and neck area, although sometimes arms, hands, or feet may be used.
- These are normally stimulated by hand, though very occasionally some practitioners may use a gentle electric current.
- The treatment session is generally 15 - 25 minutes and uses 4- 12 needles.
- For some, the needling can cause some discomfort, but many describe it as uncomfortable but not painful. For many patients, there is virtually no sensation at all.
- During the treatment session, your dentist may do some other dental treatment. In these cases, acupuncture can be helpful to enhance the outcomes of your treatment, such as treatment of a very sensitive gag reflex to allow dental treatment to be carried out.

Will it work for me?

- From the evidence provided by numerous studies and experiments, we know that acupuncture works and that the results are not simply due to a placebo effect.
- Acupuncture stimulates the nervous system, to produce a number of positive effects. It has been shown to modify the way pain signals are felt and releases natural painkillers including endorphins & serotonin, in the nervous system. These are released both locally at the site of needling as well as in the central part of the nervous system and the brain.
- Acupuncture also helps to reduce spasm in muscles, allowing better blood flow, to improve function and reduce pain.
- Acupuncture does more than just control pain, it has a generally beneficial effect on health - many patients report feeling generally better and often report better sleep, following a treatment

Each individual will respond to acupuncture in their own way. Some patients notice an immediate improvement, whilst others find that several treatments are needed before the full effect is felt.

There are unfortunately a small number of people who do not respond to this type of treatment. ~70% of patients demonstrate post-treatment benefits. It is important to remember that unfortunately about 10 - 15% of patients will show no response.

Conditions that can be improved/treated with Dental Acupuncture

- Muscle Spasm
- Temporomandibular Joint Pain
- Dry Mouth
- Prominent Gag Reflex
- Dental Anxiety
- Chronic Stress Headache
- Migraine
- Sinusitis
- Facial Pain syndromes

What to expect after treatment?

- Tiredness - Many patients report feeling a little tired after a treatment.
- Bruising - Occasionally the acupuncture sites may feel slightly tender or bruised for 24 hours or so following treatment and very occasionally a bruise can appear, which will disappear over a few days.
- Improvement in other conditions - It is not uncommon for patients to report other beneficial changes, for example their back pain improves
- Other conditions may change - In some cases, unfortunately other aches may become more obvious as the major problem is treated and improves.
- If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to ask your dentist for more information.

Are there any risks?

Acupuncture is generally considered a safe treatment and actually has few significant risks when practiced in the hands of experienced, trained dentists.

The most common side effect may be a temporary exacerbation of symptoms. This is often considered a good sign with improvement or resolution of symptoms often following. Occasionally some small areas of bruising can appear, which normally resolves quickly.

In a very small number of patients, who are very sensitive to acupuncture, fainting may occur, but this is rare.

Who should I see?

Members of the British Dental Acupuncture Society undertake specific training in dental acupuncture techniques, to ensure you achieve the best, predictable results. We aim to provide you with the benefits of both acupuncture and conventional dental treatments, which often can work well together.

As dentists, we ensure high levels of infection control practices are upheld to ensure your safety and all needles used are sterile and single use.