

What is acupuncture? Acupuncture is a system of medical therapy used in China for more than 2,500 years for a wide spectrum of human and veterinary illnesses. It utilizes small, hair thin needles to initiate physiologic responses of repair and regulation in the body. Sometimes it is used as a stand-alone therapy and other times it is used together with other therapies. It has a long history of beneficial use in both animals and humans. You do not need to believe in acupuncture in order for it to be helpful.

NIH Consensus Conference on Acupuncture: In 1997, the National Institutes of Health conducted a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on acupuncture. The NIH consensus statement on acupuncture was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in November 1998. The NIH panel stated that “the data in support of acupuncture are as strong as those for many accepted Western medical therapies. One of the advantages of acupuncture is that the incidence of adverse effects is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same conditions.”

The NIH panel concluded that acupuncture may be useful in a list of many common medical conditions. Its role may be as an adjunct therapy for some, an acceptable alternative for some conditions, and as part of a comprehensive management program for many.

Acupuncture’s use in the setting of cancer care: Acupuncture is now part of comprehensive cancer care in many of the most distinguished cancer hospitals in the United States. Unite for HER has partnered with cancer centers since 2009 to make this therapy available to women going through breast cancer and ovarian cancer care in our area.

For which conditions is acupuncture helpful during cancer care?

The conditions encountered in cancer care for which acupuncture is commonly found to be helpful are:

- Pain (muscle and joint pains, headaches, bone pain)
- Gastrointestinal problems such as nausea, vomiting, indigestion, constipation, diarrhea
- Hot flashes, night sweats
- Insomnia, anxiety, depression
- Neuropathy
- Fatigue

Acupuncture is also very beneficial to help recovery and return to normal health after cancer therapy is finished. Acupuncture is not used as a replacement for modern anti-cancer therapies such as surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

How does acupuncture work? Acupuncture stimulates the neuroendocrine system. Its effects are broad and multi-systemic, providing a wide array of beneficial effects.

Acupuncture stimulates the production of the body’s own pain relieving biochemicals which include endorphins and enkephalins, making it very useful for pain conditions, including chronic pain, cancer related pain, chemo induced neuropathy and aromatase induced joint pain.

Acupuncture stimulates the release of serotonin in the brain and body, and is commonly very beneficial for anxiety, depression and insomnia.

Acupuncture stimulates the production of immunomodulators, which decrease inflammation, increase production of red and white blood cells for improved hematologic function and improves blood circulation with useful effects for tissue healing and lymphedema management.

Acupuncture stimulates the endocrine system with beneficial effects on hormonal balance and decreased symptoms of hot flashes.

What can I expect during treatment? Receiving an acupuncture treatment can be a unique and powerful healing experience. Expect to spend 1–2 hours with your acupuncturist during the initial evaluation and treatment session. The initial session is a comprehensive interview, review of medical and prior testing, and physical assessment. Wear comfortable clothing for your treatment. Plan to be treated for 6-12 sessions. Your acupuncturist may use electro-acupuncture, the gentle application of an electrical current, or moxibustion, the burning of an herb near the needles or skin to enhance the physiologic effect.

It is common to have a sense of deep relaxation during the treatment, followed by deep restorative sleep and renewed energy after the treatment.

Is acupuncture painful? The acupuncture needles are quite different than the hypodermic needles most patients are familiar with. Acupuncture needles are solid, very thin, almost hair-like needles that have a gentle stimulating effect on the tissue. Most patients are pleasantly surprised by the difference and many say that they experience only minimal sensation. The sensation experienced during an acupuncture treatment is often described by patients as an achiness, fullness, or pressure at the acupuncture site.

To learn more about acupuncture and watch a video about it go to the UFH website:
<https://uniteforher.org/therapies/>