

Patient information factsheet

Acupuncture for an overactive bladder

We have given you this factsheet because your physiotherapist believes acupuncture treatment could help your overactive bladder symptoms. It will explain what acupuncture is, what the treatment involves and what the potential risks and benefits are. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions, please speak to a member of our team using the contact details at the end of this factsheet.

What is an overactive bladder?

An overactive bladder, or OAB, is where a person frequently gets a sudden and compelling need or desire to pass urine (pee).

Symptoms of an overactive bladder include:

- rushing to the toilet (urinary urgency) frequently during the day and night
- leaking urine on the way to the toilet

These symptoms are difficult to defer (put off).

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a treatment derived from ancient Chinese medicine, where fine needles are inserted at certain points on the body. These needles stimulate different nerves and can have a pain-relieving or therapeutic effect. If you have an overactive bladder, the needles will be placed to send signals through the sensory nerves that supply your bladder.

When done by a healthcare professional (a doctor, nurse or physiotherapist), acupuncture is a safe and effective form of treatment. The needles are single-use, pre-sterilised and disposable.

Acupuncture is often used alongside other forms of physiotherapy treatment, such as pelvic floor exercises and bladder training. Your doctor or physiotherapist can advise you about these.

Who can have acupuncture treatment?

Acupuncture may not be suitable for everyone. You should tell your physiotherapist if:

- you are pregnant or are trying to become pregnant
- you suffer with fits (epilepsy)
- you have a heart pacemaker or sacral nerve stimulation (SNS) device
- you take blood thinning medication
- you are diabetic
- you have a blood clotting condition (haemophilia)
- your lower legs and feet are numb or have reduced sensation

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You **should not** have acupuncture treatment if you have:

- an allergy to stainless steel
- a needle phobia
- red, swollen or broken skin in the needle area

What are the benefits of acupuncture treatment for an overactive bladder?

Each person responds differently to acupuncture treatment. If your overactive bladder responds to the treatment, the benefits can last up to six months or longer, and may include:

- fewer bladder contractions
- less need to rush to the toilet
- less need to urinate during the day and night
- a smaller amount of urine being leaked

How long do the sessions last?

Each acupuncture session lasts for about 20 minutes.

You will initially be offered two or three sessions of acupuncture to see if there are any changes in your overactive bladder symptoms. After these initial sessions, your physiotherapist will advise you of the number of sessions you will need (up to a maximum of six).

You can have more than one course of acupuncture. You will need to ask your GP to re-refer you to the physiotherapy department for this.

On the day of your appointment

You should eat and drink normally on the day of your appointment.

When you arrive for your appointment, you will need to complete a consent form before your treatment. Your physiotherapist will go through this with you.

You will then need to empty your bladder before your treatment starts, so that you are comfortable.

Your physiotherapist will ask you to sit or lie down. You may need to remove some of your clothing (not your underwear) so that the physiotherapist can access certain areas of your skin. We will make sure that your dignity is maintained.

The physiotherapist will then insert fine needles in specific positions on your body. The position of the needles will vary, but you can expect the needles to go:

- in your lower legs and feet
- across your lower back
- around your stomach

During the acupuncture treatment, you may feel sensations such as:

- aching
- throbbing

If these become too uncomfortable, you can ask your physiotherapist to stop the acupuncture treatment. This will not affect further treatment.

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You may want to arrange for someone to take you home after your first acupuncture appointment.

Side effects

Acupuncture does have some side effects. After an acupuncture session, you may:

- feel sleepy
- feel nauseous (sick or queasy)
- have pain where the needles punctured the skin
- bleed or bruise where the needles punctured the skin

Your symptoms may seem worse for a short time after your acupuncture treatment. This is a sign of a strong reaction and can mean that the acupuncture treatment is likely to be helpful for your overactive bladder symptoms.

Contact us

For more information or advice, please contact the physiotherapy department.

Physiotherapy department

Telephone: **023 8120 6699** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm)

Women's health physiotherapy team

G level

Princess Anne Hospital

Coxford Road

Southampton

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Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/acupuncture/

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**