

Orthopaedic Connection

Acupuncture? Maybe.

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

I rarely have a patient come into the office asking for an injection (a shot as they call it). Most people do not like needles and prefer to avoid them if at all possible. I get that. We are all different in how we react to things.

Enter Acupuncture

Everyone of course has heard of it, but has rarely thought that it might be a technique that could relieve their pain. Hmm. Traditional therapies haven't helped and you'd prefer a non – drug way to control pain. “Well, *acupuncture*, maybe. Tell me more.”

Evidence

Very briefly, Chinese medicine has used acupuncture to treat pain for thousands of years. Energy known as chi travels in meridians. Pain results from a blockage of chi. Very thin needles inserted at points along the major meridians can relieve the blockage of chi and restore balance.

Apparently it's one of those things that you accept or don't even though you can't really understand it. Anything else you can't understand, but take on faith? See what I mean?

First

You shouldn't just go for acupuncture treatment because you have pain somewhere. A medical evaluation is important to make sure you don't have a serious condition that requires some other specific treatment. So it is important to take that first step.

OK, I'll Do It

The acupuncturist will take a medical history which is an important step before any initial medical treatment. Then of course you need to be examined. Acupuncture is used on many parts of the body: lower back, neck, knee, hip, elbow even the foot.

A session can take up to 30 minutes, but often less. Don't always expect the needles to be placed at what you feel the pain source is.

Pain with acupuncture is not a major drawback because the needles are small and you feel an initial prick, but not much after that. Most patients get relief with up to 6 sessions, but occasionally more are needed.

Safety

When performed properly it is safe. You will want to be treated by a licensed acupuncturist or a licensed physician who performs acupuncture frequently in their practice. The needles used are disposable single - use needles.

Afterwards

You don't want to counter the effect of the acupuncture so it's necessary to avoid rigorous physical activity for 24 hours. Normal everyday activities are fine.

- Most patients get relief of pain for several weeks to months.
- Pain relief is not immediate
- Coverage by insurance varies. You can find out whether it is covered.
- If acupuncture is not covered consider what your deductible or co-pay is on all that Physical Therapy or those potentially harmful epidural steroid injections you had.
- Consider it if pain does not respond to traditional treatment. Don't go down the road of patients taking 4 – 6 Norco or Vicodin pills per day.
- So far no one has become addicted to acupuncture.

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