



Acupuncture

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a healing therapy done by inserting thin needles into the body at specific points. To help with healing, a small electric current may also be run through the needles.

How does acupuncture work?

Many people believe that a life energy, called qi (pronounced CHEE), circulates throughout the body. If the qi is blocked, disease can occur. Acupuncture helps qi flow more easily. It stimulates the nervous system to release chemicals that reduce pain.

Who benefits from acupuncture?

Research shows that acupuncture may help people with chronic pain, especially musculoskeletal pain. It also helps with nausea and vomiting. Other conditions, such as migraines, insomnia and abdominal pain, may also benefit from acupuncture.

Will acupuncture cure my pain?

For some people, acupuncture can help reduce pain for hours, days, or weeks. Although the relief may last a long time, it usually is temporary. Acupuncture is one way to reduce pain while you learn other ways to manage your pain.

How do I know if acupuncture will work?

You and your acupuncturist will generally know if acupuncture is helping you within four or five treatments. When it does help, you may feel the effects right away, or it may take time. It often helps to write down how your symptoms respond to the treatments.

Does acupuncture hurt?

The needles usually do not hurt, but if they do, you should let the acupuncturist know right away. Most patients feel only a little pain as the needles go in. Many feel no pain at all.

Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is safe. However, as with any procedure there are risks, possible side effects, and sometimes complications. Risks from acupuncture are very rare. They include infection, bleeding, or injury. Sterile needles are used only one time, so the risk of infection is small. If you are bleeding after a treatment, let the acupuncturist know. Sometimes people feel faint from the needle.

How do I get acupuncture?

You need a referral to the acupuncture program. The clinicians in the acupuncture program will tell you if it is right for you.

Is acupuncture covered by my Kaiser Permanente health care plan?

Yes and no. Like most of the services and treatments Kaiser Permanente provides, it is an option that can be used when it is appropriate. The amount of coverage depends on your condition. We usually recommend acupuncture as an option for chronic pain.

What do I do if it does not work or I do not want it?

Sometimes acupuncture works, and sometimes it doesn't. Treating chronic pain usually combines several approaches. Physical therapy, medication, exercise, relaxation, and counseling to change negative thought patterns can all help people better manage pain.

Acupuncture can help while you learn other self-management techniques, like acupressure, physical therapy, and exercise. Talk to your provider for more information.

What is acupressure and how is it different from acupuncture?

Acupressure is another healing art. Key points (called pressure points) are pressed with the fingers to stimulate the body's natural healing abilities. When these points are pressed, they release qi, decrease muscle tension, and improve circulation.

You may be taught to do acupressure at your acupuncture sessions. Practicing acupressure at home is an important part of getting the most out of acupuncture.

When to call Kaiser Permanente

Call Kaiser Permanente if, after acupuncture, you experience any of the following:

- Bleeding at the needle site that will not stop
- Redness, swelling, or signs of infection at the needle site

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Other resources

Visit kp.org/mydoctor to:

- View most lab results and check your preventive health reminders
- Email your doctor
- Use interactive online tools to help keep you and your family healthy

Contact your facility's Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.