Acupuncture

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a therapy that is believed to use the body’s natural healing ability to reduce pain and improve functioning. In acupuncture, very fine needles, slightly thicker than a human hair, are inserted into specific points in the body called acupoints.

How does acupuncture work?

We don’t fully understand how acupuncture works. Scientists believe that when the acupoints are touched on the patient’s body, the patient’s nervous system will release chemicals, such as endorphins, in the body. These chemicals may promote the body’s natural healing ability, reduce pain, and promote physical and emotional well-being.

What conditions can be treated by acupuncture?

Scientific studies have shown that acupuncture can be an effective treatment for pain and nausea. While acupuncture is sometimes used to treat other conditions, there is less information about its effectiveness. You can speak with one of our providers to determine if acupuncture may help your child.

How is acupuncture performed?

Acupuncture will be performed in a gentle and safe manner.

Before Treatment:

- Your child’s Health Care Team will talk with you about your child’s health problem and then decide if acupuncture therapy is appropriate for your child.
- We may ask about your child’s daily activities and what they like.
- We may check your child’s pulse and do a brief physical examination.

During Treatment:

- Your child will be offered a gown, towel or sheet for comfort. We may use a blanket or heat lamp to help keep your child warm during the treatment.
- We will ask your child to lie down.
- We will decide which points on the body to use, based on the problem being treated.
- We will insert needles into acupuncture points. We may need to insert needles into areas of the body away from the affected area to get the best results.
- The needles usually stay in place for 10 to 20 minutes. It is very important for your child to lie still during this time to allow your child’s body time to stimulate its natural healing ability.
- At the end of the session, the needles will be removed.

Some children may find it hard to lie still during the session. If for some reason your child is unable to lie still, we will not proceed with acupuncture in order to protect your child’s safety.
Who will perform my child’s acupuncture treatment?

Your child’s treatment may be done by a physician acupuncturist or a licensed acupuncturist.

How many treatment sessions are needed?

The exact number and schedule of treatments depends on your child’s symptoms. Most patients require 6 to 12 treatment sessions. Sometimes two sessions per week will be needed to show relief of symptoms. The acupuncturist will work with you and your child to develop a unique treatment plan.

How long are typical treatment sessions?

The first session usually lasts 60 minutes. Follow up sessions usually last about 30 minutes or less.

Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is safe when performed by properly trained providers. Serious side effects are very rare. The Acupuncture Program at CHOP is closely managed to ensure your child’s safety. Our acupuncturists are skilled in caring for children, and are trained in decreasing any anxiety or fear associated with the needles used for acupuncture.

Does acupuncture have side effects?

Your child may feel energized by treatment, or more relaxed or drowsy after treatment. When the needles are inserted, your child may feel pressure at the acupuncture point. Sometimes your child may have minor bleeding or bruising at the site where the needle was inserted.

Is acupuncture painful?

Most children have little to no pain and report less than 2 out of 10 on a pain scale. Some patients may feel a gentle pinch when the needle is inserted, others feel a tickle.

Does acupuncture replace traditional medicine?

Acupuncture is not a substitute for medical diagnosis and treatment. Our staff can suggest ways to include acupuncture in your child’s care plan. Please talk to your medical provider about whether acupuncture should be considered for your child.

Please share any questions or concerns about acupuncture with your child’s care team.