

Instructions for Self Home Acupuncture

written by the BMAS Medical Director in February 2021

Equipment needed

- sterile single-use acupuncture needles (size as directed by your practitioner)
- a tissue (in case of minor bleeding)
- a sharps container (for safe disposal of used needles)

Preparation

- gather the equipment you need
- wash your hands with soap and water
- ensure that you have washed the acupuncture sites within the last 12 hours
 - ⦿ wash again after gardening or outdoor exercise

Position

- Ensure you are in a comfortable position lying or sitting
 - ⦿ remember that you may not be able to move after the needles are in position
- Ensure the environment is safe for you and others
 - ⦿ pets or young children should be looked after in another room
 - ⦿ using a mobile device is fine, as long as movement of your hands and arms does not disturb the needles
 - ⦿ movement of the body where the needles are placed may be painful
 - ⦿ relaxation may be more optimal by avoiding use of mobile devices

Procedure

- remove one needle at a time from its package, usually by peeling apart the layers
- ensure the needle is ready for insertion
 - ⦿ this will depend on the type of needle
 - ⦿ L-type Seirin needles have plastic handles that are attached to the inside of the guide tube in one spot
 - ⦿ this spot weld needs to be broken before the needle can be used
 - ⦿ ensure that the needle stays inside the guide tube after the spot weld is broken
- place the needle and guide tube combination on the skin at the chosen site
 - ⦿ your practitioner will have instructed you how to find the site
 - ⦿ the videos in this resource may serve as a reminder
- hold the guide tube between the thumb and index finger of one hand and allow the needle to drop lightly onto the skin
 - ⦿ usually it is best to use the non-dominant hand
 - ⦿ that would be the left hand for a right-handed person
- with one finger of the dominant hand, tap the needle handle quickly and firmly
 - ⦿ the needle will pass quickly through the skin
 - ⦿ you may not feel very much

- now remove the guide tube carefully, and gently take hold of the handle of the needle
- check the direction in which the needle is pointing (as instructed by your practitioner)
- smoothly insert the needle to the required depth
 - ⊙ depth is judged by the length of needle visible above the skin subtracted from the full length
- repeat the process for each needle and site
- relax and leave the needles in place for the time recommended
- perform gentle movements intermittently to stimulate sensation at the needle sites if you have been advised to do this, otherwise remain relaxed and still
- if you have been instructed in the use of electroacupuncture and have a device, attach the leads to the pairs of needles as directed, select the required programme on the device and gently increase the intensity of stimulation
 - ⊙ if the needles are in muscle points the intensity should be set high enough that you see some muscle contraction or needle movement in time with the sensation
 - ⊙ often a mixed frequency of stimulation is used, such as 2/15Hz
 - ⊙ the device changes from 2Hz to 15Hz or from 15Hz to 2Hz every 3 seconds
 - ⊙ at 2Hz the needles will move twice in a second
 - ⊙ at 15Hz the needles will vibrate gently
- at the end of the recommended time remove the needles one at a time and place them immediately into a sharps box
 - ⊙ have a tissue ready and apply pressure for a few seconds in case of minor bleeding

Possible problems

Problem	How to avoid it	What to do if it happens
Pain on needling – at the skin surface	Avoid any vessels visible under the skin, even the very small ones	Remove the needle and reinsert it a few millimetres away
Pain on needling – beneath the skin	Insert the needle faster at the surface of the muscle layer	Wait to see if it settles, if not, remove and reinsert the needle a few millimetres away
Fainting	Lie down if possible, and avoid painful needle sensations	Ensure the subject can lie down safely and elevate their legs until they come around
Nausea	Gentle insertion and manipulation of the needles Avoid looking at the needles after insertion	Remove the needles, breath calmly and wait for the nausea to resolve
Drowsiness	This is more likely to be related to the individuals than the treatment, and so is probably not avoidable Often it is not considered an adverse event by patients	Rest for a while and avoid driving or operating machinery

Stuck needle	This is very uncommon, but may be more likely with movement after needle insertion	Wait for a minute or two and try to remove the needle again If it remains stuck, place another needle into the same muscle near the one that is stuck, and they should both be easy to remove
Broken needle	This is very rare with the use of single-use disposable needles Always use the best quality needles	Immediately try to remove the retained portion of the needle Use pliers to grip the shaft if necessary If the retained portion is not accessible, avoid pressure on or around the site and seek medical help
Bleeding	Try to avoid needling through visible blood vessels under the skin	Press firmly on the site with a tissue for 5 seconds If bleeding continues (unusual), continue applying pressure for longer
Bruising	Try to avoid needling through visible blood vessels under the skin	Avoid needling into the bruised area at the next session
Infection at site – redness, swelling, pus visible at site	Only perform SHA after washing your hands and the sites of needling Use sterile single-use needles	Clean the area and apply antiseptic Consult your GP if the area of redness starts to increase in size or does not resolve within a day or so At subsequent sessions do not needle into red or swollen areas