



Integrative Therapy Fact Sheet: Acupuncture

What is Acupuncture?

The use of acupuncture dates back more than 2,500 years. Originating in China, acupuncture is now practiced around the world. According to a national survey, about 15 million US adults have used acupuncture.

During an acupuncture treatment, specially designed hair-thin needles are placed into specific locations on the body. These places are rich in nerve endings. When acupuncture needles are worked by either hands or mild electronic current, the sensation sends nerve impulses to the spine and brain regions that activate the body's healing power to help correct and rebalance the system. Acupuncture does not involve any drug.

How Can Acupuncture Help Me?

Acupuncture may be used for people with symptoms that include chronic pain, nausea, vomiting, insomnia, hot flashes, neuropathy, depression, anxiety, and fatigue. Acupuncture may be used during or after active treatment – such as surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or hormonal therapy – to reduce the side effects of cancer treatments or manage cancer-related symptoms.

You should only use an acupuncturist who understands your current medical condition and who is experienced in treating cancer patients. All of the acupuncturists at the Zakim Center have specialized training in oncology acupuncture.

Possible Side Effects

- Acupuncture may cause bleeding if platelets are very low.
- There may be mild discomfort and slight bruising at needle sites.
- Cancer patients with metastatic diseases or currently undergoing active cancer treatment like chemotherapy may have a high risk for infection and other complications due to a weak immune function.

These side effects are rare. At the Zakim Center, our oncology acupuncturists always check your doctor's notes and latest lab results before each of your visits to make sure your condition is appropriate for an acupuncture session.

What Has Been Proven?

Using acupuncture to manage symptoms related to cancer treatment is a new field. Research has shown that acupuncture is effective for chemotherapy-induced nausea, vomiting, hot flashes, dry mouth, joint pain, fatigue, neuropathy, chronic pain, anxiety, poor sleep and improving quality of life of cancer patients.



Acupuncture has been recommended by several professional organizations, including the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the National Comprehensive Cancer Network. Dana-Farber conducts research on the benefits of acupuncture for symptom management.

Acupuncture at the Zakim Center

Your first acupuncture session is 60 minutes long and return visits are 45 minutes. Your first visit requires a bit more time to allow you and your acupuncturist to discuss:

- your medical history, treatment, laboratory results, and any information that will help your acupuncturist provide you with a safe and effective session;
- any adjustments that may be needed to make you comfortable during your session;
- benefits of acupuncture for your condition and symptoms;
- what your goals are for this session and/or ongoing sessions; and
- any questions that you might have before starting the acupuncture session.

The acupuncture session involves different areas of your body depending on your needs and comfort. Whether seated in a chair or having a session on an acupuncture table, your comfort and safety is our first concern, and you are encouraged to discuss your comfort needs with the acupuncturist.

After the session, your acupuncturist will check in with you and see how you are doing, and will discuss:

- any questions you may have;
- observations, expectations, and recommendations; and
- resources that are available and may be appropriate for you.

To Schedule an Acupuncture Appointment at the Zakim Center

To schedule an acupuncture appointment, please call **617-632-3322**. Acupuncture services are available to Dana-Farber patients only.

Cost of Acupuncture

We do not accept insurance for acupuncture appointments. However, you may request a detailed receipt to submit to your insurance company for reimbursement if acupuncture is a covered service. Patients pay \$85 for their first acupuncture appointment and \$65 for each return visit.

Thanks to the generosity of donors, financial assistance is available to those who qualify. For more information, please contact the Zakim Center at **617-632-3322** or **Zakim_Center@dfci.harvard.edu**.

Additional Information

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health's "Acupuncture" Page

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/acupuncture>



Dana-Farber
Cancer Institute

Leonard P. Zakim Center
for Integrative Therapies and Healthy Living

To learn more about the Zakim Center's programs and services, please visit our website at **dana-farber.org/zakim**, email **Zakim_Center@dfci.harvard.edu**, or call **617-632-3322**.

This document is for informational purposes only. The content is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.