

Your first acupuncture visit

The questions people ask most often, answered plainly.

Will it help me?

Acupuncture is part of a whole system of East Asian medicine, which covers a wide range of conditions: low back and joint pain, headaches, sports injuries, digestion, allergies, menstrual and fertility concerns, insomnia, stress and anxiety. Ask your practitioner about your own.

Does it hurt?

Usually not. The needles are about the width of a hair. You may feel a brief pinch, a dull ache, tingling or a spreading warmth — or nothing at all. Many people fall asleep during treatment.

How deep do the needles go?

From a fraction of an inch to about an inch, depending on the area of the body being treated.

Are the needles clean?

Yes. Needles arrive pre-sterilized, are used once and are then discarded. The FDA has regulated acupuncture needles since 1996 and requires single-use labeling.

How long is an appointment?

A first appointment usually runs 60 to 90 minutes, because it includes a full intake. Return visits are typically 20 to 45 minutes.

How many visits will I need?

Several factors determine this: the condition, how long you have had it and your general health. Your practitioner will recommend a course of treatment and revise it as you respond.

What does it cost? Will insurance cover it?

Fees vary by practitioner and region, so ask when you book. Some health plans cover acupuncture and some do not — check your benefits, and ask whether the office bills insurance.

How will I feel afterwards?

Most people feel relaxed; some feel energized. Any soreness is mild and passes quickly.

Should I keep seeing my doctor?

Acupuncture is generally used alongside conventional care. Tell your physician you are having acupuncture, and your acupuncturist about your other care.

What is qi?

Qi (say “chee”) is the East Asian theory of the body’s circulating vitality — *ki* in Japanese, *gi* in Korean. Acupuncture aims to keep it moving freely. You do not need to believe in it for acupuncture to work.

Will I be given herbs?

Sometimes, as pills, powder or loose herbs to brew. Tell your acupuncturist about every medication and supplement you take.

How do I know they’re qualified?

A California licensed acupuncturist completes a 3,000-hour master’s program and passes the state exam. The license must hang where you can see it, and you can look up any name at search.dca.ca.gov.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU GO

Eat something. Come with a light meal in you, not on an empty stomach.

Wear loose clothes. Arms and legs need to be reachable.

Bring your list. Medications, supplements and recent test results.

Find a licensed acupuncturist near you

CSOMA’s Find a Practitioner directory lists licensed acupuncturists across California.

csomaonline.org/find-a-practitioner