

## Clinical Policy: Acupuncture

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[Coding Implications](#)

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### Description

Acupuncture involves the manual and/or electrical stimulation of thin, solid, metallic needles inserted into the skin. Acupuncture has been studied for the treatment of many conditions, but some of the more common and studied indications include pain, nausea and vomiting, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, allergic rhinitis and addictive behavior.

### Policy/Criteria

- I. It is the policy of Pennsylvania Health and Wellness® that, when a covered benefit under the member's benefit plan contract, needle acupuncture is **medically necessary** when provided by a licensed acupuncturist or other appropriately licensed practitioner for whom acupuncture is within the practitioner's scope of practice and who has specific acupuncture training or credentialing and *any of the following* conditions:
- A. Postoperative or chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting;
  - B. Nausea and vomiting of pregnancy;
  - C. Chronic low back, neck, or shoulder pain;
  - D. Chronic migraines or moderate to severe chronic tension headaches, defined as headaches >14 days per month for more than 3 months;
  - E. Pain from clinically diagnosed osteoarthritis of the knee.

An initial course of 6 visits over 1 month is considered medically necessary. If improvement in the condition occurs following the initial course of treatment, an additional 6 visits over 2 months is considered medically necessary to maintain improvement.

- II. All other indications are considered experimental/investigational and **not medically necessary**.

### Background

Acute conditions typically are treated 2 to 3 times a week for two to three weeks then frequency is gradually reduced until treatment is no longer needed. Generally treatment will last for 2 to 3 months. There is insufficient evidence in studies to establish a defined treatment protocol for any condition.

Acupuncture is an ancient treatment originating in China approximately 2000 years ago. It is one of the oldest medical procedures in the world. It is a form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) that has been more commonly practiced in the United States beginning in 1971. Acupuncture theory is largely grounded in two major Chinese philosophies, Confucianism and Taoism. The two philosophies emphasize the importance of nature and for humans to integrate and abide by these laws rather than to resist them. The goal of the clinician is to maintain the body's harmonious balance both internally and in relation to the external environment. It is

believed treatment should not be solely symptom focused, so treatment is usually very individualized and two patients with the same symptoms often do not get the same treatment.

Three important concepts of acupuncture are qi, yin/yang, and the Five Elements: wood, water, fire, earth, and metal. Qi is often translated as “vital energy”. It is felt to permeate all things, may assume different forms, and travel through meridians located on the body. Disturbances in the flow of qi, such as stagnant, depleted, collapsed or rebellious, are believed to cause disease. Yin and yang are complementary opposites. Yin represents more material, dense states of matter and yang represents more immaterial, rarefied states of matter. The relationship between the two is dynamic and cyclic. The acupuncturist must employ a series of qualitative assessments to establish a patient’s present balance of yin and yang. The Five Elements represent different basic processes, qualities or phases of a cycle. Each can generate or counteract another element. Most vital organs, acupuncture meridians, emotions, and other health-related variable are assigned an element, providing a global description of the balancing dynamics seen in each person.

These principles are used by the acupuncturist to diagnose and treat individuals based on the nature of the imbalance. The aim is to shift the constitution towards balance with the use of various interventions, acupuncture being one important option.

The diagnostic evaluation of the acupuncturist may be extensive and complex, incorporating assessment of practically everything, including skin, complexion, bones, channels, smells, sounds, mental state, preferences, emotions, demeanor, and body build. Once the diagnosis is established, fine metal needles are inserted into precisely defined points to correct disruption in harmony. Needles are removed after being in place for 10 to 15 minutes while the patient lies relaxed. Treatments can occur one to two times a week and the total number of sessions is variable dependent on the condition, disease severity and chronicity.

There are many proposed models for the mechanism of action of the effects of acupuncture; however the data have been either too inconsistent or inadequate to draw significant conclusions. The theory in regards to the analgesic effect of acupuncture, associates the neurotransmitter effects such as endorphin release at both the spinal and supraspinal levels. Functional MRI studies have demonstrated various physiologic effects, associating acupuncture points with changes in brain MRI signals. Another theory is that acupuncture points are associated with anatomic locations of loose connective tissue.

Evidence from a number of randomized, blinded, placebo-controlled studies indicate that acupoint stimulation can be effective in the management of *postoperative nausea and vomiting*, particularly in women, with mixed results in pediatric populations. Acupoint stimulation for women undergoing chemotherapy also reduced nausea and vomiting in some studies, but no effect was reported in a study involving both men and women. The evidence regarding alleviation of morning sickness by acupoint stimulation is limited, less rigorous than for postoperative nausea and vomiting, and ambiguous.

## Acupuncture

Recent data on acupuncture for *postoperative dental pain* is limited, but earlier evidence indicated promising results for this use. Data was most promising for pain relief following tooth extraction.

There are a number of randomized controlled trials that establish improvement in *headache* frequency, intensity, response, use of relief medication and quality of life relative to usual care and relief treatment only. However, the trials failed to demonstrate that acupuncture is more effective than sham acupuncture. Results were ambiguous regarding efficacy of acupuncture relative to prophylactic drug treatment. There was insufficient evidence available to conclude the efficacy of acupuncture compared with nonpharmacological interventions.

Acupuncture for *osteoarthritis pain* appears to be effective, particularly for pain in the knee. Recent literature has shown relief of pain and improved function in osteoarthritis of the knee for patients treated with acupuncture.

Acupuncture has been studied for a variety of other reasons, but studies and evidence does not currently support its use for indications such as, but not limited to, arm pain, temporomandibular joint dysfunction, menstrual cramps and fibromyalgia.

## Coding Implications

This clinical policy references Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®). CPT® is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association. All CPT codes and descriptions are copyrighted 2020, American Medical Association. All rights reserved. CPT codes and CPT descriptions are from the current manuals and those included herein are not intended to be all-inclusive and are included for informational purposes only. Codes referenced in this clinical policy are for informational purposes only. Inclusion or exclusion of any codes does not guarantee coverage. Providers should reference the most up-to-date sources of professional coding guidance prior to the submission of claims for reimbursement of covered services.

CPT® Codes	Description
97810	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; without electrical stimulation, initial 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient
97811	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; without electrical stimulation, each additional 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient, with reinsertion of needles(s)
97813	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; with electrical stimulation, initial 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient
97814	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; with electrical stimulation, each additional 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient, with reinsertion of needles(s)

## ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes that Support Coverage Criteria

+ Indicates a code(s) requiring an additional character

ICD-10-CM Code	Description
G43.001-G43.919	Migraine
G44.221- G44.229	Chronic tension-type headache
M17.0-M17.9	Osteoarthritis of knee
M25.511-M25.519	Pain in shoulder
M50.00-M54.9+	Other dorsopathies
O21.0-O21.9	Excessive vomiting in pregnancy
R11.0-R11.2+	Nausea and vomiting

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	Approval Date
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References reviewed and updated.	11/18	12/18
References reviewed and updated. Specialist review.	12/2020	01/2021

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