How acupuncture helped me

Acupuncture involves inserting fine needles at specific points in the skin. The needles may be stimulated manually, by heat or by a small electrical current (electroacupuncture). They are very fine, so having them inserted is rarely painful. You may sometimes feel a sensation of heaviness or tingling where the needles go in - this is considered a good sign.
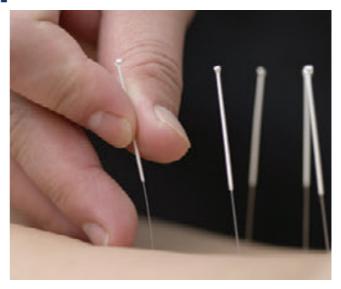

Acupuncture is widely accepted as being an effective treatment for pain. There is now clear scientific evidence that it works for conditions such as osteoarthritis of the knees and low back pain, and it is now recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) as a treatment for low back pain.

This means that acupuncture can be available to you on the NHS. Alternatively, if you decide to seek treatment privately do try the British Acupuncture Council. You can search for a local practitioner on their website (www. acupuncture.org.uk) or call them on 020 8735 0400.

Sophie's story

I first had acupuncture when I was pregnant with my first child – about 13 years ago. Jessica was overdue and I really didn't want to have my labour induced, as I knew that that could be very painful. I had heard that acupuncture was good for bringing on natural labour, and luckily that is what happened. Whether this was due to acupuncture, drinking gallons of raspberry tea, eating hot curries or the natural course of things I can't really say. I had also twisted my ankle really badly and, after acupuncture, I had no swelling at all the next day. As far as I was concerned it was a miracle and I was hooked.

I have had acupuncture regularly with the same lovely woman over the last 13 years and I am more and more convinced that it helps me, in a whole variety of ways. My acupuncturist practices traditional Chinese acupuncture and I usually just have needles, occasionally with Moxa which is a way of applying heat to acupuncture points. This is especially nice when it's cold outside. It is not painful but sometimes there is a strong tingling or 'pulling' sensation which is proof to me that the needles are really doing something. My acupuncturist would say that they have tapped into the 'chi' or energy lines in my body – and I can really feel it happening.

As any qualified acupuncturist will tell you acupuncture treats the whole person, the system as a whole, not the symptom that something is wrong. It therefore helps my emotional state, as well as my physical state, and can help to 'rebalance' me so that I feel more able to cope with my AS. I get very bad fatigue and acupuncture can help boost my system so that I feel more able to cope, and perhaps even sleep better.

Due to my AS I do sometimes go to my acupuncturist with acute pain, which she is often able to help with, but I think that she is more helpful in being able to boost my system in a more fundamental way and stop me getting those terrible flare ups as often or as badly as I used to. I think that acupuncture has helped make the pattern of my AS much 'calmer' and has helped me avoid the worst 'peaks and troughs' – I have fewer flare ups and they are less acute and last less long.

I have also had acupuncture when I have had iritis (you have to be very brave to have the needle so close to your eye!), when I have had been in chronic pain, when I have had acute pain in my back or neck, had muscle spasms, been stressed and anxious and when I have been pregnant with my other two children. I believe it is has really helped me with all these things.

It would not be true to say that acupuncture has 'cured' my AS, or taken the pain away, but I believe that it helps enough to be a significant factor in the way I cope with my disease. I have no tangible proof that it works, but I really believe that it does, and I certainly notice a difference if I haven't been for a while. My only complaint is that people with long term conditions like AS are not able to get regular acupuncture free on the NHS – that would certainly help my bank balance!