

**Battlefield  
Acupuncture (BFA)  
Handbook**

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This handbook was developed by the U.S. Air Force Acupuncture and Integrative Medical (AIM) Center located at Joint Base Andrews.

The mission of the AIM Center is to foster the delivery of integrative medicine for healthcare services promoting non-pharmacological methods to reduce the use of opioids, when possible, and offer effective treatment without side effects that reduce readiness.

More information about the AIM Center can be found at  
<https://kx.health.mil/kj/kx1/AcupunctureAndIntegrativeMedicineCenter>

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# **BFA Technique**

Non-pharmacologic and non-opioid pain therapies should be considered as first-line treatment for mild/moderate pain or as an adjunct to opioid medications, which can include Battlefield Acupuncture (BFA). To safely administer BFA, appropriate training must have been completed and documented from the Acupuncture and Integrative Medicine (AIM) Center at Joint Base Andrews or other approved training organization.

## **1. Patient Selection**

All non-pregnant patients 18 years of age or older, regardless of medications or diagnoses, may be considered for the BFA technique if they have:

- ✓ **acute or chronic pain**
- ✓ **an interest in receiving acupuncture treatment in the ear**
- ✓ **ability to observe for the rare instance of inflammation**
- ✓ **availability to follow up by phone or by visit**

Patients should NOT receive BFA if:

- ✗ **they are pregnant or might be pregnant**
- ✗ **they have an aversion to needles or a vasovagal response to needles**
- ✗ **there is active infection present in an ear which is to be treated  
(treat only the uninfected ear)**
- ✗ **a bleeding disorder is present (relative contraindication)**
- ✗ **current or previous keloid scar formation on the either ear**
- ✗ **patient not currently experiencing pain**

A specific medical diagnosis must be made for the condition being treated before any BFA needles are placed. Pain which has persisted for greater than six months and is stable is usually safe to treat. Pain that is changing, new, or acute demands careful evaluation before BFA treatment is offered. Modifications of this expectation may be indicated in battlefield situations.

There are duty restrictions which apply when acupuncture is performed on aviators and other special duty personnel. BFA treatment on any member on active flying status (or other special duty status) must be coordinated with the member's flight surgeon or responsible provider.

## **2. Offering BFA to Patients**

The use of acupuncture to treat pain is less common than using medications. Make sure the patient is willing to try acupuncture by introducing it with open-ended statements such as:

***“One way of treating your pain is an integrative medical approach. The DoD recognizes that many non-traditional treatments such as chiropractic and acupuncture can be very effective in treating certain types of problems, particularly pain. I can offer you a type of ear acupuncture called Battlefield Acupuncture. If you’re interested, I can tell you a little more about that, and you can decide if you are willing to try it.”***

If the patient is interested, allow him or her to review the Patient Information Handout, “What is BFA?,” and the Patient Consent Form. After the handouts have been read, if the patient remains interested, you may either choose to perform BFA right then, or schedule a future appointment.

## **3. Education and Consent**

Prior to placement of the BFA needles, make sure the patient has received information about BFA and signed a Consent for Procedure Form (OF522); a sample form is included in this handbook. Make sure to cover the following topics:

- Explain the procedure to the patient, reviewing the likely outcomes and the unlikely (but possible) complications.
- Solicit and answer questions.
- Have the patient sign the Consent Form.

These statements may be helpful in explaining the technique:

***“This is the tiny, micro-needle we will use today (hand one to the patient). It is sterile and has a 1 mm point and a shiny gold disk. There are neither medications nor chemicals on the needle. It will stay in your ear until it falls out on its own within two to four days. You can wash, shampoo, shower, and swim with the BFA needle in place. Be careful when drying your ears; it is best to gently pat them dry. If necessary, you can remove them at any time with your fingernails or with tweezers. In the very unlikely event that the needle should cause the skin to be inflamed, red, increasingly tender, or make it ooze, then remove the needle promptly and dispose of it in the trash. This will prevent development of an infection.”***

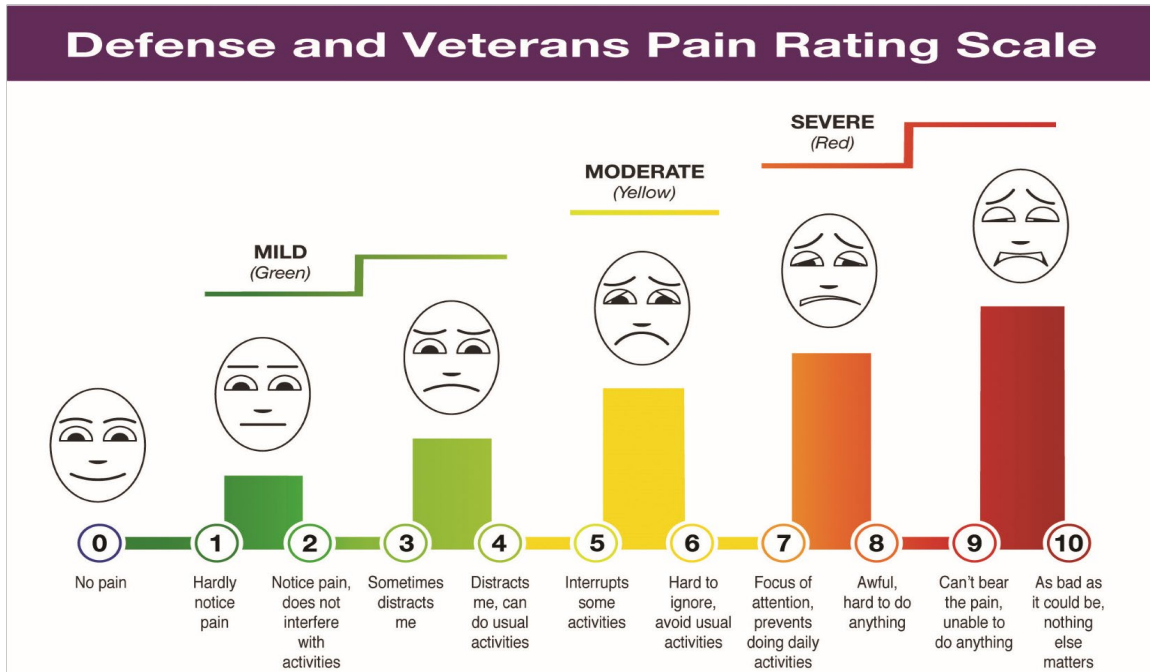
Pause to answer any questions, then conclude with:

***“The BFA technique involves inserting one needle at a time into specific acupuncture pain control points in your ear, using a specific sequence. You may require one, two, or up to 10 needles to get maximum pain relief. You are in control, and we can stop at any time. Each time I insert a needle, I’ll ask you how you feel and have you walk a short distance. Walking accelerates the pain reduction process after placement of the needle. The insertion of the needle may release neurotransmitters which are circulated into the blood stream. Walking may improve the effect of these chemicals. Remember, you are in control, so we’ll stop whenever you want to stop or when your pain is controlled or at 0-1/10.”***

# BFA Procedure

## Before Beginning

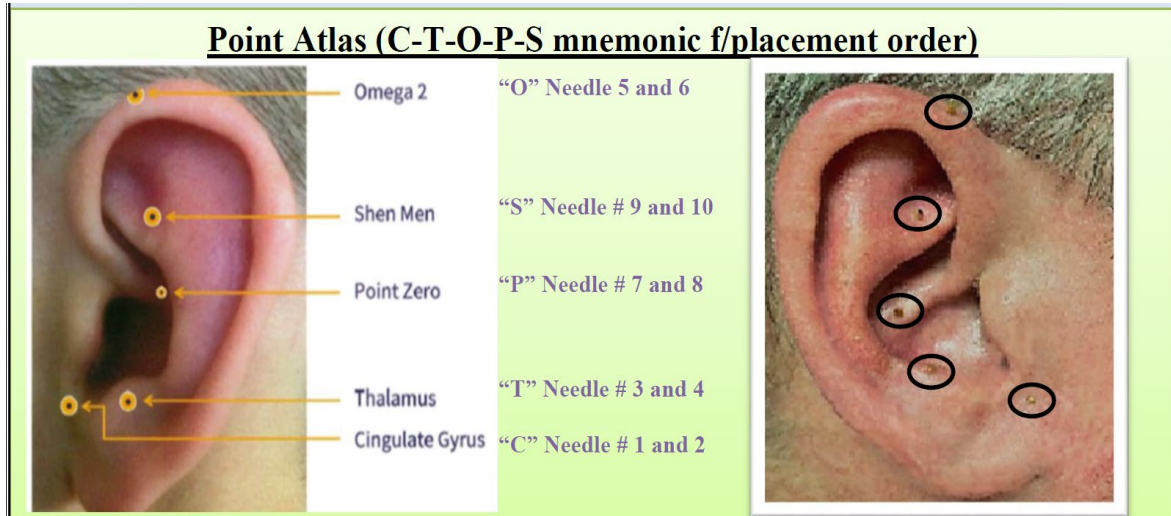
Be certain to have the patient rate the pretreatment pain level using the Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS) pain scale:



BFA only uses gold Auricular Semi-Permanent (ASP) acupuncture needles (see photo, below). Up to 10 needles will be needed for a single treatment, so ensure adequate supplies are available.



The ASP needles are always inserted in a specific sequence, beginning on one side of the ear and then alternating to the corresponding point on the opposite ear. You may want to adopt the practice of always beginning with the ear on the same side as the pain. This will improve your consistency and help you keep track of where you are in the treatment.



### **1. Insertion sequence (Reference the BFA Point Atlas, above):**

**Step 1:** Clean both ears with an alcohol wipe and wash your hands.

**Step 2:** Assess the initial pain level. Insert the needles in the order described below until either the pain is reduced to 0-1/10, a significant side effect occurs, or the patient desires to stop the treatment.

**After each needle is inserted, assess for lightheadedness, vasovagal symptoms and euphoria.** Ask the patient to walk briefly. On return from the walk, reassess the patient’s pain level and evaluate for significant side effects. Needles should be inserted with the patient seated.

**Step 3:** Insert the 1st needle in the **Cingulate Gyrus** point.

**Step 4:** Insert the 2nd needle in the opposite ear, in the Cingulate Gyrus point.

**Step 5:** Insert the 3rd needle in the **Thalamus** point of the ear initially treated.

**Step 6:** Insert the 4th needle in the opposite ear, in the Thalamus point.

**Step 7:** Insert the 5th needle in the **Omega 2** point of the ear initially treated.

**Step 8:** Insert the 6th needle in the opposite ear, in the Omega 2 point.

**Step 9:** Insert the 7th needle at **Point Zero** of the ear initially treated.

**Step 10:** Insert the 8th needle in the opposite ear, at Point Zero.

**Step 11:** Insert the 9th needle in the **Shen Men** point of the ear initially treated.

**Step 12:** Insert the 10th needle in the opposite ear, in the Shen Men point.

**Step 13:** **Document the needles placed**, the final pain level, and any other effects or side effects.



## **2. Managing Side Effects**

If severe light-headedness occurs, lie the patient flat on the examination table until the symptoms resolve. Remove the last needle placed, and do not continue with the treatment. Have an office staff member remain constantly with the patient until he or she is able to first sit and then stand without symptoms. It is reasonable to offer a drink of water.

Patients may also experience a euphoric response. If this occurs, ask the patient to remain in the clinic until the feeling is gone or has stabilized. Advise the patient not to drive or use machinery until the feeling has resolved.

## **3. Completing Treatment**

After the BFA treatment, document the final pain level. Suggest that the patient keep brief written notes of their response to treatment, for example, changes in pain symptoms, changes in sleep pattern or depth, feelings of well-being, and energy levels. Ask the patient to bring this information to the next visit.

Remind the patient about the small possibility of drowsiness, light-headedness, or euphoria occurring up to 30 minutes after the treatment.

Review home care instructions for the BFA needles and the symptoms and signs of inflammation. Remind the patient to pull the needles out if they suspect inflammation is developing. Let the patient know that if this happens, you will evaluate the area of inflammation at the next scheduled visit. If the inflammation continues to worsen after needle removal, advise the patient to seek care right away.

Advise patients to avoid strenuous exercise, heavy house work, or yard work prior to treatment and for the rest of the day. Patients should also avoid alcohol and sex during the six hours before and after the treatment.

#### **4. Recommended BFA Component of S.O.A.P Note**

**S.** Reviewed “What is Acupuncture” handout. Informed consent obtained.

**O.** Patient tolerated the BFA treatment very well or experienced the following symptoms during treatment and what actions were taken. Pain before treatment x/10, pain after treatment x/10. Gold ASP needles placed at (list points).

**A:** Provide the diagnosis (reason for BFA)

If a privileged provider documenting in an electronic health record:

- Enter ICD-10 diagnosis
- Enter CPT Code 97810, “Acupuncture without electrical stimulation, first 15 minutes.” If your treatment lasts longer than 15 minutes, add CPT code 97811, “Acupuncture without electrical stimulation, additional 15 minutes.”

If a non-privileged provider documenting in an electronic health record

- Enter ICD-10 Diagnosis Code (Symptom based) (approved code for team members/support staff) or use the diagnosis code previously assigned to patient for BFA treatment.
- Enter CPT Code 97810, “Acupuncture without electrical stimulation, first 15 minutes.” If your treatment lasts longer than 15 minutes, add CPT code 97811, “Acupuncture without electrical stimulation, additional 15 minutes.”
- Enter Other specified patient education: Z71.89 (comment attached to this code should be specific to the education the nurse/tech has provided to the patient (e.g. provided patient with BFA Aftercare instructions handout)
- Use Evaluation and Management (E&M) Disposition: Face-to-face counseling E&M code 99211.

**P.** Warned about the possibility of drowsiness, light-headedness, or euphoria occurring during the treatment or within 30 minutes of treatment.

Reviewed aftercare of BFA needles including signs and symptoms of infection. The patient was instructed to remove the needles if they suspect inflammation is developing. Patient advised to avoid strenuous exercise, heavy house or yard work prior to treatments and for the rest of the day.

No sex or alcohol within six hours of treatment. The patient will continue to take any prescription medications as directed. The patient was instructed to keep written notes of their response to treatment (pain, sleep, well-being, and energy) and will bring this information to the next visit.

# **BFA Aftercare Instructions**

## **1. Activity**

You should have a relatively easy day today if possible. Avoid strenuous exercise, heavy house work, or yard work. Avoid alcohol and sex for a minimum of six hours after the treatment. Eat a healthy and moderate diet today. Following these instructions on the day of your next BFA treatment may enhance the effectiveness of the treatment. You may return to your normal activity on the day following treatment.

## **2. Needles**

The needles may fall out in two to four days. They may be uncomfortable when you sleep or brush something (the telephone for example) over them. If the discomfort is causing distress, you may remove them with tweezers or your fingernails. Once the needles are out, dispose of them in a container with a lid.

## **3. Inflammation**

Signs of inflammation include redness, warmth, swelling, or increasing pain at a needle site. If you suspect inflammation, remove the affected needle/s right away. Arrange follow-up with your BFA provider. After removing the needles, if the symptoms worsen, seek care immediately.

## **4. Medications**

Continue your prescription medications as directed by your regular provider. If your provider permits, you might consider not taking pain medication on the day of your next treatment in order to better assess the pain relief provided by battlefield acupuncture.

## **5. Treatment Results**

Take written notes of your response to the treatment, and bring them with you to your follow-up visit. Include the status of your pain, changes in depth/pattern of sleep, energy levels, and feelings of well-being. Your BFA provider will use these notes to optimize your ongoing care.

# **Patient Information Handout:** **What is Battlefield Acupuncture?**

## **What is acupuncture?**

Acupuncture is an effective form of health care that originated in China between three to five thousand years ago. Fine needles are placed in specific points in the body to create a desired effect. Many theories exist on how acupuncture works and modern science continues to build upon earlier theories. Ancient theories explain that acupuncture affects Xi (pronounced “chi”, also known as “energy”) as it flows through pathways in the body. Modern science has shown that acupuncture can affect chemicals in the brain, spinal cord, and tissues that modulate pain and healing.

## **Where does Battlefield Acupuncture fit within the scope of traditional acupuncture or full-body acupuncture?**

The scope of practice for Medical Acupuncturist and Licensed Acupuncturists is full-body acupuncture and involves needles placed within 12 zones all throughout the body, Battlefield Acupuncture is a form of auricular (ear) acupuncture in which needles are placed only on the surface of the ear. The theory behind ear acupuncture is that the entire body and all of its functions are represented on various points on the ear. This representation allows treatment of far-ranging conditions using needles applied only to the ear. There is growing scientific evidence that confirms a therapeutic benefit to distant body functions, areas of illness or pain, when needles are applied to the ear.

## **Where did Battlefield Acupuncture come from?**

Battlefield Acupuncture was created by Dr. Richard Niemtzow while on active duty in the United States Air Force in 2001. Dr. Niemtzow discovered that a very specific sequence of needles inserted into the ears would provide rapid and highly effective relief of nearly all types of pain and he adapted the treatment for military use including deployed environments.

## **Tell me about the needles... do they hurt?**

Battlefield Acupuncture uses very small semi-permanent needles which are inserted into the skin of the outer surface of the ear at five distinct points. Most patients experience minor, temporary discomfort when these needles are placed. The needles remain in place for 2-4 days, then fall out on their own. If the needles become too uncomfortable during routine activities, they may be easily removed with fingernails or with tweezers.

## **Who should avoid Battlefield Acupuncture?**

This technique is extremely safe and effective for a broad variety of patients and pain conditions. However, you should not undergo Battlefield Acupuncture if you are pregnant (or might be pregnant), afraid of needles (or have fainted when being treated with needles in the past), or have a serious bleeding disorder. There are also specific restrictions against receiving Battlefield Acupuncture for active duty members who are on active flight status or in a special mission programs. In these cases, treatment needs to be coordinated with your Flight Surgeon or operational provider.

## **What are the possible side effects of Battlefield Acupuncture?**

Although Battlefield Acupuncture has an outstanding safety record, even safe procedures carry some risk of side effects. Side effects include the following: feeling euphoric or light-headed, discomfort or pain at the needled sites, bleeding or bruising, inflammation, infection, dizziness, nausea, fainting, and drowsiness. If you undergo several treatments, temporary discoloration may occur on the treated area of the ear. It is extremely rare for symptoms to become worse during treatment.

## **Will Battlefield Acupuncture help me?**

It has been shown that approximately 80% of people with pain symptoms will respond favorably to Battlefield Acupuncture. There is no way to determine, in advance, who will respond to treatment. Some patients obtain permanent relief of pain with a single treatment, some patients receive only brief relief. The majority of patients can expect to have several days of relief with the first treatment, and subsequent treatments often extend the period of symptom reduction.

## **What can I do to optimize my treatment?**

On the day of your treatment, avoid strenuous exercise, heavy house work, or yard work. Avoid alcohol and sex for a minimum of six hours before and after the treatment. Eat a healthy, moderate diet all day, to include a light meal before receiving your treatment. Unless instructed otherwise by your regular doctor, continue all of your medications during acupuncture treatment. Keep notes or journal your response to the treatment; you may wish to include the character of your pain, changes in sleep, energy levels, and feelings of well-being. Bring these notes with you so that your Battlefield Acupuncture provider can use them to personalize your treatment.

## **Consent for Acupuncture (DoD O.F. 522)**

The Department of Defense Optional Form (OF) 522 can be used to document a patient's consent for initial BFA treatments. Subsequent treatments can be done after verification the written consent is on file and verbal consent of the patient. The written consent does not expire after a certain timeframe or number of procedures.

The overprint on the following page has a pre-filled OF 522 for Battlefield Acupuncture, developed by the AIM Center in 2021.

If needed, the blank OF 522 form can be located at:

<https://www.gsa.gov/forms-library/medical-record-request-administration-anesthesia-and-performance-operations-and-other>

MEDICAL RECORD

**REQUEST FOR ADMINISTRATION OF ANESTHESIA  
AND FOR PERFORMANCE OF OPERATIONS AND OTHER PROCEDURES**

**A. IDENTIFICATION**

|                                     |                        |   |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 1a. (Check all applicable boxes)    |                        | 1b. DESCRIBE                              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | OPERATION OR PROCEDURE | Battlefield Acupuncture (BFA) (Auricular) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | ANESTHESIA             |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | SEDATION               |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | TRANSFUSION            |   |

**B. STATEMENT OF REQUEST**

2. The nature and purpose of the operation or procedure, possible alternative methods of treatment, the risks involved, and the possibility of complications have been fully explained to me. I acknowledge that no guarantees have been made to me concerning the results of the operation or procedure. I understand the nature of the operation or procedure to be (describe operation or procedure in layman's language)

PROCEDURE: Insertion of small semi-permanent needles in up to five distinct points in each ear for pain reduction. Risks: Including but not limited to pain, bleeding, bruising, inflammation, infection, scar, or keloid formation at insertion sites; nausea dizziness, euphoria, or fainting. Alternative: no treatment, other types of acupuncture; traditional western medicine, current tx

which is to be performed by or under the direction of Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

3. I request the performance of the above-named operation or procedure and of such additional operations or procedures as are found to be necessary or desirable, in the judgment of the professional staff of the below-named medical facility, during the course of the above-named operation or procedure.

4. I request the administration of such anesthesia as may be considered necessary or advisable in the judgment of the professional staff of the below-named medical facility.

5. Exceptions to surgery or anesthesia, if any are: None  
(If "none", so state)

6. I request the disposal by authorities of the below-named medical facility of any tissues or parts which it may be necessary to remove.

7. I understand that photographs and movies may be taken of this operation, and that they may be viewed by various personnel undergoing training or indoctrination at this or other facilities. I consent to the taking of such pictures and observation of the operation by authorized personnel, subject to the following conditions:

- a. The name of the patient and his/her family is not used to identify said pictures.
- b. Said pictures be used only for purposes for medical/dental study or research.

(Cross out any parts above which are not appropriate)

**C. SIGNATURES**

(Appropriate items in parts A and B must be completed before signing)

8. COUNSELING PHYSICIAN/DENTIST: I have counseled this patient as to the nature of the proposed procedure(s), attendant risks involved, and expected results, as described above. I have also discussed potential problems related to recuperation, possible results of non-treatment, and significant alternative therapies.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Counseling Physician/Dentist)

9. PATIENT: I understand the nature of the proposed procedure(s), attendant risks involved, and expected results, as described above, and hereby request such procedure(s) be performed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Witness, excluding members of operating team)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Patient)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date and Time)

10. SPONSOR OR GUARDIAN: (When patient is a minor or unable to give consent) \_\_\_\_\_ sponsor/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ understand the nature of the proposed procedure(s), attendant risks involved, and expected results, as described above, and hereby request such procedure(s) be performed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Witness, excluding members of operating team)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Sponsor/Legal Guardian)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date and Time)

PATIENT'S IDENTIFICATION (For typed or written entries, give: Name -- last, first, middle; ID no. (SSN or other); hospital or medical facility)

|              |          |
|--------------|----------|
| REGISTER NO. | WARD NO. |
|              |          |

**REQUEST FOR ADMINISTRATION OF ANESTHESIA  
AND FOR PERFORMANCE OF OPERATIONS  
AND OTHER PROCEDURES**

Medical Record

OPTIONAL FORM 522 (REV. 8/2003)  
Prescribed by GSA/ICMR FMR (41 CFR) 102-194.30(I)

## **BFA References & Resources**

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### **Additional Policy/Guidance**

- DHA-PI 6025.04, *Pain Management and Opioid Safety in the Military Health System* (8 Jun 18)
- DHA-PI 6025.33, *Acupuncture Practice in Military Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs)* (20 Feb 20)
- DHA-PM 6025.13, *Clinical Quality Management in the Military Health System, Volume 4 Credentialing and Privileging* (29 Aug 19)
- DoDM 6025.13, *Medical Quality Assurance (MQA) and Clinical Quality Management in the Military Health System (MHS)* (Oct 2013)