Acupuncturist interview questions

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What to expect

Acupuncturist interviews focus on clinical reasoning, patient safety and your ability to communicate treatment in plain language. Employers want to see that you can assess thoroughly, work within AHPRA and Chinese Medicine Board requirements, and build trust with patients who may be new to acupuncture.

- **Clinical reasoning:** Questions that ask you to walk through an assessment or treatment plan for a specific presentation, such as chronic pain or stress.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for a real example from your practice, often about a difficult case, a patient who did not respond, or a time you educated someone on lifestyle changes.
- **Safety and infection control:** Questions about needling safety, blood-borne virus precautions, sharps disposal, and managing patients on anticoagulants or with compromised immunity.
- **Client-facing communication:** Questions that test how you explain acupuncture to a nervous patient, obtain informed consent, and handle questions about evidence or side effects.
- **Regulatory and professional:** Questions about AHPRA registration, Chinese Medicine Board standards, continuing professional development, and record keeping.

Most acupuncture interviews are a single session with the clinic owner or a senior practitioner, lasting about 30 to 45 minutes. The conversation usually starts with your registration and training, then moves to case-based questions and your treatment philosophy. Some clinics include a short practical demonstration where you need a few points on a colleague or model and talk through your technique. You may also be asked to discuss a de-identified case study or complete a written scenario.

1. Walk me through how you assess a new patient who presents with chronic shoulder pain.

Why they ask

This tests your clinical reasoning and whether you can structure an assessment safely and logically.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step walk-through: begin with the patient's history and presenting complaint, then describe your observation, palpation, range of motion, and pulse or tongue diagnosis. Explain how you form a differential and choose a treatment plan, and finish with how you review progress.

Example answer

“First I take a full history, asking about the onset, what makes the pain better or worse, and any previous injuries or investigations. I observe posture and shoulder movement, then palpate the affected area and surrounding muscles, checking for tenderness and restriction. I also take pulse and tongue signs to understand the broader pattern. After that I explain my working diagnosis and propose a treatment plan, which might include local and distal points, plus cupping or moxibustion if appropriate. I always check for red flags like unexplained weight loss or night pain and refer on if needed. I book a review after three or four sessions to reassess.”

2. Tell me about a time a patient did not respond as expected to treatment. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

This reveals your reflective practice, honesty and ability to adjust treatment without blaming the patient.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the situation briefly, the task or goal, the action you took, and the result. Keep the focus on what you learned and how you changed your approach.

Example answer

“I had a patient with irritable bowel syndrome who came for acupuncture after trying several other approaches. After four sessions her symptoms had not improved much, so I sat down with her to review the whole picture. I realised she was under a lot of work stress and had not been able to make the dietary changes we discussed. I adjusted the treatment to focus more on stress management, referred her to a psychologist through her GP, and gave her one small dietary change to try instead of a full overhaul. Over the next six sessions her bloating eased and she felt more in control. That experience taught me to check in earlier and to keep treatment goals realistic.”

3. A patient tells you they are taking blood-thinning medication and asks about acupuncture. How do you proceed?

Why they ask

This is a safety question. Employers want to know you understand contraindications and can communicate risk clearly.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: acknowledge the patient's question, assess the risk, check your professional guidelines, decide whether to treat or refer, and document the conversation.

Example answer

“I would thank the patient for telling me and explain that blood-thinning medication increases the risk of bruising and bleeding, so I need to take extra care. I would check which medication and dose, and ask when they last took it. I would avoid points that are over large blood vessels or where bleeding would be hard to control, and I would use finer needles and apply pressure after removal. If the risk seemed too high, I would not proceed with needling that day and would suggest they speak with their GP about whether acupuncture is suitable. I would document the discussion and the decision in their file.”

4. How do you explain acupuncture to a patient who is nervous about needles?

Why they ask

This tests your empathy and your ability to gain informed consent without overpromising.

How to structure your answer

Empathy-first explanation: validate the concern, describe the sensation and the equipment, show the needles, offer alternatives, and confirm consent before starting.

Example answer

“I start by acknowledging that it is completely normal to feel nervous, and I ask what specifically worries them. I explain that the needles are very fine, much thinner than a blood test needle, and that most people feel a mild ache or tingling rather than sharp pain. I show them an unused needle and let them hold the tube if they want. I also explain that we can start with just one or two points and build up gradually, and that they can ask me to stop at any time. If they are still not comfortable, I might offer acupressure or cupping instead. I always get clear consent before I begin.”

5. What steps do you take to ensure infection control and compliance with AHPRA and Chinese Medicine Board requirements?

Why they ask

This checks your technical knowledge and your commitment to professional standards.

How to structure your answer

Checklist-style: walk through the key steps in order, from hand hygiene and single-use needles to sharps disposal, documentation, and continuing professional development.

Example answer

“Before every treatment I wash my hands and use alcohol-based hand rub. I only use sterile, single-use needles and I never reuse them. I dispose of needles immediately in a sharps container and follow my clinic's needle stick injury protocol if there is an accident. I clean surfaces with hospital-grade disinfectant between patients. I keep accurate treatment records, including consent and any adverse events. I also complete regular continuing professional development on infection control and keep my AHPRA registration and Chinese Medicine Board standards up to date. Every year I review my practice against the current guidelines.”

6. Describe a time you advised a patient on diet and lifestyle changes and how you supported them to follow through.

Why they ask

This tests your health education skills and whether you can motivate patients without being prescriptive.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result. Focus on how you made the advice practical and how you checked in.

Example answer

“I treated a patient in her fifties with insomnia and hot flushes. She was drinking several cups of coffee a day and eating late at night. I explained how caffeine and heavy meals could affect her sleep and suggested she try switching to herbal tea after lunch and having her evening meal earlier. Instead of giving her a long list, I asked her to pick one change to start with. At each session I checked in on how it was going and adjusted the plan. After a few weeks she was sleeping better and said she felt more in control. It showed me that small, patient-led changes work better than a strict regime.”