

Acupuncture in companion veterinary care

What is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture has evolved from the ancient art of placing needles into special locations on the body, aiming to alleviate pain and increase the recovery rate and resistance to disease.

It is a system of healing which has been practiced by the Chinese and other Eastern cultures for thousands of years and may be used to treat a wide variety of illnesses.

Traditional Chinese Medicine

The Chinese approach to disease is very holistic. Emotional, hereditary and environmental factors are all considered important in disease patterns. The philosophy and aim of Traditional Chinese Medicine is to restore equilibrium between physical, emotional and spiritual factors, thus restoring and maintaining health. Treatment involves the use of needles in specific acupuncture points (often in combination with herbal therapy) to achieve this balance, by addressing imbalance in Yin and Yang and the flow of Qi and Blood etc.

Western Scientific Approach

The Western view of acupuncture is used predominately in the treatment of musculoskeletal disorders, and, in particular, chronic pain states in animals. With this approach a diagnosis will have been reached through conventional medicine and a specific problem then targeted. Classic acupuncture points may be used for a 'segmental' effect (ie points are needled in the same spinal segments as the affected or painful area innervation is thought to originate). This is thought to cause 'pain gating' as well as producing some pain inhibition (via various brain and spinal cord pathways). Acupuncture also stimulates the release of pain relieving chemicals in the brain and spinal cord (endorphins, serotonin etc) which produce more generalised or 'extrasegmental' analgesia.

In addition local needling of painful points in taut muscle bands may be used.

With either approach the result is that acupuncture may be particularly effective in the treatment of chronic disease states, either to complement orthodox treatments, or when orthodox treatment fails.

How does it work?

Acupuncture is a treatment which involves the stimulation of specific points in the body, usually by the insertion of very fine, pre-sterilised stainless steel needles. This often superficial stimulation generates many responses within the animal's nervous and endocrine system. It can affect muscles, and the circulatory, reproductive, digestive and urinary systems.

Acupuncture increases the body's release of natural painkillers and modifies pain pathways in the brain and spinal cord.

How will my animal respond?

Animals on the whole accept needling very well, and in fact may become very relaxed.

The procedure is performed in a double consultation with the owner present. Occasionally animals become very tired or drowsy for up to 24 hours after treatment.

Also some animals will exhibit behavioural changes, with improved appetite and demeanor,

as well as obvious pain relief. Some animals are very responsive to acupuncture and will show dramatic improvement after one treatment. However the vast majority will respond gradually over a period of time. On average 3-6 treatments are required. These are given weekly initially with gradually increasing intervals, until the desired effect is achieved. The frequency of treatments depends on the individual animal's needs, but regular top-ups are usually required to maintain the therapeutic effect.

Some patients along with some diseases are refractory to acupuncture and will not respond to treatment.

Conditions which may respond.

These include back pain (spondylitis/spondylosis, disc disease), arthritis, hip dysplasia, muscle and ligament sprains, chronic gastrointestinal disease, lick granulomas, idiopathic cystitis



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