



Multi-Specialty Referral & Emergency Hospital

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## Veterinary Acupuncture

### ***What is acupuncture?***

Acupuncture is a healing art that originated in China over 4,000 years ago. Acupuncture is the practice of using needles to stimulate specific points on the body to manipulate the energy flow. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, there is an energy force (Qi), which runs through the body. The flow of Qi influences the health of an animal. If the flow of Qi is insufficient, unbalanced, or obstructed then disease results. Qi travels in channels in the body. The acupuncture points are specific locations where the channels come to the surface of the skin and are easily accessible. By needling specific points, the acupuncturist can help to restore balance to the body and allow it to heal itself. In this way, acupuncture can serve as symptomatic treatment for illness while also working at the root of disease.

### ***What conditions respond to acupuncture?***

Acupuncture can be used as a complementary therapy for numerous medical and surgical diseases. It is not a panacea, or cure-all, but in certain disease conditions it works well. Acupuncture has been used as a successful complementary treatment for:

- **Pain control**
- **Musculoskeletal disease** including post-operative orthopedic surgery, osteoarthritis, trigger point therapy, and joint dysplasia
- **Neurologic disease** including intervertebral disk disease, seizures, nerve injury, and vestibular disease
- **Gastrointestinal disorders** causing nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, and abdominal pain
- **Dermatologic disorders** such as allergic and infectious skin disease including ear infections
- **Behavioral problems**
- **Cardiovascular and Respiratory disease** such as nasal discharge, respiratory infections, chronic coughing, circulatory disease, and asthma

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- **Urogenital disorders** such as urinary incontinence, urinary tract infections, and chronic kidney disease
- **Immune stimulation** in immunosuppressed patients
- **Oncology patients** – to reduce the side effects of chemotherapy and improve vitality of the patient

### ***How does it work?***

Acupuncture points are not random points on the body. It has been shown that bundles of free nerve endings, small arterioles and veins, lymphatic channels, and numerous white blood cells are found at acupuncture points. Acupuncture works primarily through effects on the central nervous system but also affects the musculoskeletal, hormonal, and cardiovascular systems. Acupuncture causes a release of neurotransmitters and neurohormones (such as natural endorphins in the body) to relieve pain. It also relieves muscle spasms, stimulates nerves, stimulates the immune system, increases blood flow, and decreases inflammation.

### ***Is acupuncture painful?***

Acupuncture is performed with sterilized thin, filamentous stainless steel needles. It is not painful. The patient feels the needle only as it goes through the skin. Once the needle is in place, the patient may feel a warmth, heaviness, or tingling. Many animals relax and may even fall asleep with their needles in place.

### ***Is acupuncture safe?***

Acupuncture is one of the safest therapies available when practiced by a competent veterinary acupuncturist. Side effects are rare. Sometimes a patient's condition may decline for a day or two after treatment before improvement is seen.

### ***What are the advantages and disadvantages of acupuncture?***

Acupuncture is a natural alternative therapy that enlists the body's healing mechanisms to maintain homeostasis and manage disease processes. Unlike with some pharmaceutical treatments, side effects are rare. Acupuncture techniques can be used for symptomatic treatment of certain clinical signs while also working at the root of disease.

The main disadvantage of acupuncture is a misunderstanding of what to expect from its use: the belief that the pet will miraculously improve, that all conditions can be treated with acupuncture, and that the animal will only need one treatment. Other potential and rare disadvantages include overuse of an injured limb (because of decreased pain), swallowed needles, and misapplication of acupuncture needles resulting in eye injuries, pneumothorax, infectious arthritis, and broken needles. The chances of these negative

effects occurring in clinical practice are extremely rare and are included for the sake of completeness since no treatment modality is completely risk free.

***How often and for how long will treatments take?***

The response to acupuncture is individual and the effects are often cumulative. Therefore a course of treatment over a period of weeks is generally recommended to start. Individual needles may stay in place for as little as a few seconds to as long as 30 minutes depending on the condition being treated. On average, needles are retained in place for about 15-20 minutes. There are many ways of stimulating an acupuncture point including with heat (moxibustion), electrical stimulation (electroacupuncture), and infrared light therapy. Aquapuncture involves injecting dilute solutions into acupuncture points. These procedures often enhance the duration and effect of the acupuncture depending on the condition being treated. Typically, animals are treated once a week for four to six weeks. However, frequency may be increased in certain acute conditions and maintenance therapy for chronic conditions may be spread out to longer intervals.

***Can I combine acupuncture with conventional veterinary treatment?***

Acupuncture is not exclusive of conventional veterinary treatment and the two may be used in combination. In some cases, integrative medicine will provide the best clinical outcome. Acupuncture can also offer geriatric patients with chronic debilitating conditions a treatment option when the end of the line has been reached with Western medical therapies.

***What does my veterinarian need to know about my pet?***

Before performing acupuncture on your pet, your veterinarian will need to know history details such as:

- A complete dietary history and medication list
- Usual activity level during the day and night
- A complete medical history of allergies, major surgeries, illnesses requiring hospitalization, and traumatic incidents
- If your pet has or has had cancer in the past. Please let the veterinarian know this BEFORE treatment. There is concern that improving blood flow to a tumor can encourage growth. Often acupuncture can still be performed, but not in proximity to the tumor. Acupuncture has often been used to help with the side effects of radiation and chemotherapy such as nausea and chemotherapy.
- Changes in your pet's health after all acupuncture treatments.