

Acupuncture: Not just for humans

Choosing acupuncture to heal the animals in your life

When chronic diseases and stubborn maladies are gently nudged with traditional Chinese treatments, healing is said to follow. Acupuncture, developed by the Chinese thousands of years ago, is no longer just for humans—your animal companions may also find relief from pain and discomfort through this time-tested method of natural healing.

Despite acupuncture's long history (it's been used in animals for nearly 4,000 years), veterinary acupuncture didn't come to the United States until the early 1970s. Today, dogs, cats, rabbits, ferrets, horses, donkeys, mules, ponies, birds, and all manner of exotic animals can all be treated with acupuncture for everything from allergies to behavior problems to neurological diseases. In fact, the list of symptoms and conditions treated by acupuncture is relatively long:

- Dermatological conditions: granuloma and allergic dermatitis
- Musculoskeletal disorders: arthritis, sore back, downer cow syndrome, hip dysplasia
- Respiratory diseases: feline asthma, heaves, "bleeders"
- Nervous system problems: facial nerve paralysis, intervertebral disk disease, seizures and epilepsy, lumbosacral disease
- Gastrointestinal conditions: diarrhea/constipation, vomiting, nonsurgical colic, inflammatory bowel disease, urinary and fecal incontinence, bladder stones
- Other chronic diseases: kidney disease, immune or reproductive system disorders, chronic sinusitis, geriatric issues, behavioral problems, chronic ear infections

As part of an integrative and rehabilitative medicine regime, acupuncture can be used to alleviate unpleasant symptoms, calm nerves, and in some cases, prevent disease altogether. But how does it work?

Ancient Chinese medical wisdom suggests that when the body's energy is imbalanced, the door is opened to disease. Acupuncture, therefore, is one method of balancing the body's energy in order to promote self-healing. The process involves the use of small needles that stimulate specific points in the body—those points possessing the ability to alter various biochemical and physiological conditions.

Depending on the method chosen, acupuncture can cause increased blood circulation, nerve stimulation, the release of hormones, and relief of muscle tension. By and large, insertion of the needles is painless

for the animal, although with larger species sometimes the initial insertion is somewhat uncomfortable at first (after which there is no pain).

There are various types of acupuncture used with animals today, including dry needling (which is the most common), acupressure, aquapuncture (the injection of a solution into the needlepoint), electroacupuncture (passing a small current through the needles), and moxibustion (using heat to stimulate a needlepoint).

Acupuncture sessions take varying lengths of time depending on the condition being treated and the temperament of the animal. Multiple points are usually treated simultaneously, with one point requiring anywhere from 10 seconds to 30 minutes of stimulation. Generally speaking, if the problem is acute, fewer and shorter sessions are required; chronic conditions require a greater time commitment.

Together with an exercise plan, nutritional supplements and dietary recommendations, as well as other diagnostic and healing techniques, acupuncture has been shown to be effective at treating many health problems in animals.

To find out more about this alternative pet therapy, consult the following organizations:

The American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture
(<http://www.aava.org>)

International Veterinary Acupuncture Society
(<http://www.ivas.org>)

