

ASK THE VET

By: Dr. Rose DiLeva VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA

ARTHRITIS

Question:

My 9 year old Springer spaniel was just diagnosed with arthritis. The veterinarian called it “spondylosis” of her spine. Can acupuncture help her?

Answer:

Spondylosis can be a very painful condition for dogs, cats and even small pocket pets such as rabbits, ferrets and hamsters. Generally, spondylosis refers to a condition that affects the bones (vertebrae) protecting the spinal cord. Anatomically, it is the backbone. The individual vertebrae protect the spinal cord. There is a sponge-like material, the disc material that cushions the area between the vertebrae. When a condition such as spondylosis occurs it is because extra boney material starts to form at the front end and the back end of the vertebra. Frequently, this is due to misalignment, trauma, infection and general wear and tear of the bones as a result of aging. Simply stated spondylosis is a “form of arthritis”.

I have seen arthritis develop as a result of bacterial infections, viral infections and fungal infections. In our part of the country, the Northeast, Lyme disease is endemic. This means that there are more cases of Lyme disease diagnosed in this location than there is in other parts of the country. This is generally due to the large population of white-tailed deer and the fact that the deer tick carries the organism. This makes it easier for the human and the

pet population to be exposed. It is not necessary to walk through the woods the get infected. These ticks are very adaptable. They can be found on the tips of grass, on shrubs, and in ground cover. Your pet can pick up an infected tick very easily; get bitten and manifest signs fairly quickly. The organism that causes Lyme disease is called a spirochete. Spirochetes tend to migrate through the muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints of the body. If they settle in your pet's joints a serious case of degenerative arthritis can develop. Lyme disease can be the cause of arthritis in many cases.

Can acupuncture help? Yes, you bet it can ! Frequently, arthritic type conditions occur as an animal or person gets older. Spondylosis causes the nerves coming out of the spinal cord, which are protected by the vertebrae, to get irritated. This irritation of the nerves causes pain. Acupuncture can ease the irritation to the nerves and make the pet feel much better. In my experience, acupuncture improves the quality of life in pets that have an arthritic condition such as spondylosis. Acupuncture combined with the appropriate Chinese herbal formula(s) has been more beneficial then just acupuncture alone.

The pharmaceutical industry provides us with a multitude of synthetic medications to treat "the pain of arthritis". The problem is that they come with a multitude of side effects as well. Some of the more common side effects with this particular class of medications are vomiting, diarrhea, and gastrointestinal infection, inflammation or ulceration. Additionally, many of these medications affect the liver and kidneys adversely causing an elevation of liver and kidney enzymes. An experienced and properly educated veterinarian can recommend alternatives to some of these conventional medications. Acupuncture essentially has no serious side effects in companion animals. Given the choice, I know which option I would take.

Dr. Rose DiLeva is a University of Pennsylvania graduate and practices conventional and alternative veterinary medicine. She is a certified veterinary acupuncturist and a certified veterinary chiropractor. She is owner and President of Animal Wellness Center in Chadds Ford, Pa. She can be reached at 610-558-1616 for appointments, speaking engagements or telephone consultations. Her website is www.altpetdoc.com