

ASK THE VET

By: Rose DiLeva VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA

Acupuncture in Pets

Question: Please tell me what medical conditions acupuncture can be helpful to in pets. Can any veterinarian do acupuncture?

Answer: Let me start by enlightening you to the additional education necessary to be a qualified veterinary acupuncturist. The first requirement is to be a doctor of veterinary medicine. That entails four years of veterinary medical education after four years of college. My personal acupuncture training was through The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society. This is an international organization with rules, regulations and standards that apply worldwide. This education includes lengthy classroom studies, on-hands practical examinations on dogs, cats and horses and written case reports, the quality of which must be eligible for publication in a professional veterinary journal. Additionally, to complete the course, one must do an “internship” with a certified veterinary acupuncturist in their practice. If one were to compare college credit hours to this scenario, it would be the equivalent of a PhD degree. A qualified graduate veterinary acupuncturist can be found at their web site www.IVAS.org.

Under no circumstances should a human acupuncturist practice acupuncture on an animal. Humans are bipedal (two-legged) while most companion animals I treat are quadruped (four-legged). While the meridians and the principals of Traditional Chinese Medicine are the same, there are differences with respect to the exact locations of certain acupuncture points. The transposition of these points is where the knowledge of veterinary acupuncture differs from human acupuncture. These very specific locations are of ultimate importance, for these are the points that can make the difference between treatment success and treatment failure.

Acupuncture can benefit the following conditions: arthritis, allergies, asthma, bronchitis, dermatitis, hip dysplasia, degenerative joint disease, spondylosis, gastrointestinal issues (vomiting, diarrhea, colitis, inflammatory bowel disease), cancer, seizures, kidney disease, liver disease, thyroid disease, musculoskeletal problems (sprains, strains, acute trauma, disc disease), urinary and fecal incontinence, pain management, cystitis (bladder infections, feline urologic syndrome, bladder stones), and much more.

Acupuncture is the placement of tiny needles into specific points on the body for the purposes of healing. The acupuncture needles are very thin and usually made of stainless steel. The needles are very flexible and readily bend in any direction. They range in length from 2-3 millimeters to many inches. Typically the shorter needles are placed in areas on the body that have thinner layers of muscle, such as the area above and adjacent to the backbone, the wrist or the ankle. Longer needles, on the other hand, are placed in muscles adjacent to and overlying the hips and thighs.

The World Health Organization recommends acupuncture as an effective treatment for over forty-two medical conditions, including allergies, respiratory conditions, gastrointestinal disorders, nervous system conditions, gynecological problems, disorders of the eyes, nose and throat, headaches, chronic pain associated with arthritis and degenerative joint disease, and as an adjunct in patients suffering from cancer and AIDS.

Dr. DiLeva is a 1987 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's school of veterinary medicine. She practices alternative and conventional veterinary medicine. Dr. DiLeva is a certified veterinary acupuncturist and a certified veterinary chiropractor. She can be reached at her Animal Wellness Center in Chadds Ford, Pa at 610-558-1616 for appointments, speaking engagements and telephone consultations. Her web site is www.altpetdoc.com