

# *Ask the vet*

## Veterinary Acupuncture

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

### **Question:**

Can acupuncture be helpful to pets?

### **Answer:**

Yes, acupuncture can be very helpful in all companion animals, not only as a means of treatment but, more importantly, as a preventative means of keeping them healthier and happier for the longest time possible. Acupuncture has proven beneficial in the following conditions in my experience (plus many more): asthma, allergies, arthritis, anxiety / behavior issues, musculoskeletal problems, sprains, strains, muscle spasms, bursitis, tendonitis, hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, urinary diseases, neuralgia, disc problems, spondylosis, intervertebral disc problems, skin conditions, kidney conditions, liver diseases, various types of cancer, pain management, immune system conditions, the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation, Lyme disease, chronic and acute diarrhea or constipation, inflammatory bowel disease, hind end weakness, wobbler disease, pulmonary problems such as bronchitis, pneumonia, and cardiac support.

### **Question:**

How long do acupuncture treatments in pets last?

### **Answer:**

Acupuncture treatment time depends on the condition or conditions being treated, as well as, the age of the pet. Generally speaking, however, dry needles are kept in place between 5 and 20 minutes in my office. Most of the animals get very relaxed, yawn, and often fall asleep. Acupuncture, by nature, releases some of the body's natural endorphins causing them to relax and enjoy their treatment.

### **Question:**

Is catnip safe to give my cat?

### **Answer:**

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) is a member of the Mint family. It grows readily in North America. Its primary medicinal activities have been to expel intestinal gas, as a sedative, antispasmodic, mild diuretic, helps to alleviate vomiting and most commonly, a feline euphoric. It commonly is placed in cat toys because in most cats it produces a euphoric and calming effect due to an ingredient in the plant called nepetalactone. It should be avoided in pregnant cats.

### **Question:**

How many litter boxes should I have for my two cats?

### **Answer:**

I recommend one litter pan per cat plus one more. This may sound like a lot but, in fact, some cats will only urinate in one box and pass feces in another. Also, some are reluctant to go where others have gone before them. This is why it is very important to clean out litter pans every day. I have seven cats and ten litter pans that are cleaned each day. I have seen cases through the years in which, after much questioning and ruling out medical problems, a cat starts to urinate or defecate outside the litter box. The problem is rectified by adding another litter box or two or changing the kind of litter used. Some cats do not like clay, clumping or scented litter. Cats, like people, have likes and dislikes and this applies to “bathroom” facilities as well.

**Question:** Should I leave dry food down all day and night for my pets? They are strictly indoors except for walks. My cat has play time on our balcony. Of course we play with them with their toys when home but I’m not sure that’s enough exercise.

**Answer:** After 20 plus years in practice, I have found that leaving food available all day is not a good idea. Primarily, because digestion actually starts in the mouth with the enzymes present in saliva. The fact that digestion starts in the mouth keeps our pets from just lying around the home and getting into a habit of walking by the food bowl and taking a few mouthfuls of food just because it’s there and becomes a habit. Overweight pets are also predisposed to many other diseases as they age. My recommendation is to put food (dry and canned) down at the same time in the morning and evening for an hour or so. This works well and our pets adjust to the change quickly and have those juices flowing in their mouth when they should, which is when they hear you opening the can or bag of dry food just before putting it down. In a future article I will make recommendations about what to avoid in pet foods and why.

Note: Dr. DiLeva is a University of Pennsylvania graduate and practices alternative and conventional veterinary medicine. She is a certified veterinary acupuncturist and a certified veterinary chiropractitioner. All responses given are based on her knowledge and experience in clinical veterinary practice. She can be reached at the Animal Wellness Center at 610-558-1616 for appointments, speaking engagements or telephone consultations. Her web site is [www.altpetdoc.com](http://www.altpetdoc.com)