



Featured Merchant

# ACUPUNCTURE IN PETS

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Holistic veterinary medicine is an all-encompassing approach to treatment in which all the aspects of the pet's life are taken into consideration. This means that the holistic veterinarian will do a complete physical examination, but also ask questions regarding the pet's dietary history, past medical problems, genetics, behavior, the environment in which it lives, any emotional stresses and its daily routine. All of this information together produces a bigger picture of the pet's life and health.

Now, you might ask how the environment can affect my dog's health. As an example, I had a client whose eight-month-old Labrador suddenly started having seizures. All the standard blood testing was done but nothing was found to be abnormal. I continued to ask questions about where the dog spent most of its time in and outside the house. Could he have gotten into something toxic that caused the seizures? Could he have eaten something toxic? With additional questioning, I realized that the owners lived in a town that had many older homes and that they were refurbishing the rooms in their home one at a time. I decided to make a house call and inspect the premises. It seemed that the dog's crate was kept in the kitchen and right next to his crate was a small hole in the wall where he had been licking and ingesting the paint. The house was so old that it had been painted with lead based paint. The dog was lead toxic! I ran a blood lead level and his results were off the chart. The solution to the problem was simply to keep the dog from ingesting the paint until that room was refurbished and painted (lead is no longer permitted in house paint). Once this was done the seizures resolved and never returned.

There are a number of different modalities that fall under the umbrella of "holistic" veterinary medicine. This includes but is not limited to acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine, herbal medicine, homeopathy and chiropractic. They can be used alone or in combination to provide relief and well-being.

It has been my experience that many of these holistic modalities are beneficial when classical conventional medicine has failed or no longer is effective. Many of my clients have been to anywhere from two to seven conventional veterinarians, including specialists, before coming into my hospital. Most have spent hundreds and some thousands of dollars looking for help. Many utilize alternative medicine in their own lives and wonder if the same can be helpful to their pets. The answer is that yes it can.

The practice of acupuncture was first recorded in "The Yellow Emperor's Classic", *The Huang Di Nei Jung* 475-221 B.C. These classics are conversations between the Yellow Emperor and his

minister and teacher, Qi Bo. It discusses the flow of Qi or energy, the life force that runs through all living things. Qi is that which encompasses the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of life. If one's Qi is out of balance, disharmonies and imbalances occur which result in physical and emotional symptoms of illness or Dis-ease.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, Qi travels through the body along channels or pathways called Meridians. These are pathways readily accessible in acupuncture treatment because they run close to the surface off the body. There are twelve main, eight extra and twenty-seven accessory meridians that connect over 365 acupuncture points. I compare it to a highway with many on and off ramps.

Veterinary acupuncture in Chinese literature is documented over three thousand years ago. Many of these same principals are practiced, researched and taught in the People's Republic of China and all throughout the world today. The *Huang Di Nei Jing* is still utilized and referenced today.

The ancient Chinese were astute observers, recognizing the cyclical nature of the environment. They recognized the balance in nature: day and night, heaven and earth, male and female, birth and death, winter and summer and spring and fall. Observation of the pulse, the tongue and areas of sensitivity on the skin were indicators of internal organ dysfunction. The result was a complete medical system focused on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease.

The word acupuncture is derived from the Latin "acus," which means "needle" and "pungere," which means, "to pierce." So acupuncture is the art of piercing the skin with very fine metal needles in specific predetermined locations called acupuncture points or loci, for the purpose of preventing and treating disease.

The needles used in veterinary acupuncture vary by length, width and shape of the head. Most of my pet patients are unaffected by

the acupuncture needles once they are placed. In fact, many become extremely relaxed and often fall asleep during or shortly after their treatment. The neurohumeral events that occur as a result of needle placement initiate a series of reactions in the body. This results in the release of endorphins, enkephalins and other neurotransmitters. The physical reaction is often a calming and relaxing effect which leaves the patient with a sense of well-being. This allows the body to heal itself and return to balance and homeostasis.

When a pet is ready for an acupuncture treatment, it is taken into the examination room and given a complete physical examination. After this, I determine which acupuncture points are to be treated and gently place them into their specific locations on the body. The pet is usually standing or sitting when this is done. Once the needles are in place the pet can sit, stand or lie down during the treatment. Treatments generally last between ten and thirty minutes. Most pets are calm and enjoy the sensation of relaxation.

Acupuncture point stimulation has been shown to release some of the body's natural painkillers. Additionally, acupuncture can increase oxygenation, increase blood supply to treated areas, increase white blood cell and antibody production, and stimulate bone healing.

Various methods are utilized in clinical practice to stimulate acupuncture points. Dry needling, moxibustion, laser, microcurrent therapy and aquapuncture are some examples. Dry needling involves thin, metallic needles which are inserted into the skin. Moxibustion is the application of heat to certain locations on the skin surface. Aquapuncture is injecting a small amount of a sterile liquid into the acupuncture points. Commonly utilized is Vitamin B12, which is also my personal preference. Other substances found effective are saline, antibiotics and injectable homeopathics.

Aquapuncture is an ideal choice when dealing with exotic birds like macaws or pocket pets like rabbits or guinea pigs. For small breed dogs and cats, the use of a small gauge needle (30 or 31) facilitates placement and eliminates discomfort. Subsequently, aquapuncture has a prolonged stimulating effect on the acupuncture points.

Presently, acupuncture on pets is used to treat a number of musculoskeletal problems such as hip dysplasia, arthritis and intervertebral disc disease. Other conditions that have responded positively include epilepsy, weakness (particularly hind-end weakness), urinary or fecal incontinence, diabetes, thyroid disease, asthma and allergies. Dermatological problems are frequently responsive to acupuncture as well.

Sam is a two-year-old black Labrador retriever whose owner complained of his persistent licking of his right front paw over a period of more than six months. Previous vet visits utilized topical creams and ointments, foot socks, steroids (topically and orally), anti-inflammatories and bandaging. Sam had symptomatic relief, but within a short period of time, returned to licking.

Sam's owner heard about acupuncture from a friend who employed the services of a veterinary acupuncturist for her diabetic cat. Her friend's positive experience leads her to investigate the possibilities for Sam. Sam was seen weekly for one month. It became obvious after the second treatment that the lick granuloma was beginning to resolve. Additionally, Sam's compulsiveness to lick his paw was significantly reduced. By the fourth treatment he was well on his way to complete healing. The important thing to remember here is that this condition was resolved without the use of steroids, anti-inflammatories or tranquilizers to stop the behavior and resolve the lesion.

Baby is a three-year-old brown dachshund that presented with disc issues. Baby had traumatized herself while running and ruptured a disc in her lower lumbar area. She was unable to stand on her own and could barely walk. She was dragging herself around with her front legs and dragging her back ones. The owners elected to have the surgery to correct the problem. Unfortunately, the surgery did not work. Cage rest did not work. Conventional medications did not work. Baby needed something else. A friend told her people about my hospital and they brought her in for a visit. After careful evaluation it was determined to start a regime of electroacupuncture treatments. Baby came in twice a week for three weeks.

Electroacupuncture is a means of stimulating acupuncture points using the application of a small pulsating electrical current. The needles are placed as usual and then connected to an electrode that passes between the two acupuncture needles. Baby was a good patient and responded well. After four weeks, Baby could stand on her own and walk a few steps. After eight weeks, Baby was not only standing but also walking and playing with a ball. Baby now comes in three or four times a year for maintenance treatments.

When searching for a holistic veterinarian, it is important to consider all your options. Do you want a practitioner that practices just acupuncture or do you want someone who is skilled in more than one of the holistic modalities? Presently, certifying organizations for "holistic" veterinarians do not exist. More commonly there are certifying organizations within each modality. Another consideration is to search out a pet insurance company that covers acupuncture treatments, chiropractic adjustments, homeopathy and herbal treatments.

There are hundreds of holistic veterinarians throughout the United States. Check out the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (AHVMA) at [www.AHVMA.org](http://www.AHVMA.org). You can fairly easily access a holistic practitioner in your area. Also, a list of certified veterinary acupuncturists from the American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture (AAVA) can be obtained at [www.AAVA.org](http://www.AAVA.org), as well as, the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS) at [www.IVAS.org](http://www.IVAS.org).

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