



It's vital to note that because most states classify acupuncture as a surgical procedure, it can only be legally practiced by a licensed veterinarian certified in acupuncture. These same states often similarly restrict the practice of acupressure (applying pressure to acupuncture points, instead of placing needles, to move energy around in the body). This is important to understand, because if a pet owner engages an unlicensed, non-certified practitioner, he or she will not be able to file a complaint with the state veterinary medical board if a mistake is made that harms the animal.

When to Consider Acupuncture

Veterinary acupuncture is used to treat conditions ranging from muscle

ANIMAL ACUPUNCTURE

TCM Is Not Just for Humans Anymore

by Dr. Jenny Taylor

Veterinarians that practice a holistic approach appreciate that traditional Western schooling equips them to use antibiotics and other drugs to lessen troubling symptoms, but they also ask: "Do drugs vanquish the root of the problem? Why do so many patients return with new symptoms that suggest the need for more drugs? Are permanent health and healing possible?"

Traditional Eastern Practices

While Western medicine has traditionally focused on fixing the parts of the animal that are not functioning normally, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) focuses on systematically restoring what is out of balance and affecting the quality of an animal's life as a whole.

This ancient method of treating illness uses acupuncture alongside other modalities such as acupressure, massage, nutrition, herbs, exercise and meditation. TCM practitioners believe that health can be defined as a state of harmony; if the body moves out of harmony with itself and the external environment, dis-ease and energy stagnation occur. TCM aims to unblock

this stagnation and return the body to harmony and health.

Although acupuncture has been used to treat humans for some 5,000 years, the first recorded application to an animal was about 3,500 years ago, when an elephant was treated for stomach bloat. Treatment of farm animals in rural China and Korea soon followed, but written evidence of its use on household pets has been documented only from the 20th century. From the Latin *acus*, meaning "needle," and *pungere*, meaning "to pierce," practitioners place tiny, thin, sterile needles under the skin at precise points, with the intention of moving *chi* (pronounced CHEE) around the body to prevent or treat disease.

In 1974, The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society was founded to help educate and direct veterinarians in integrating TCM and acupuncture into their practices. The society has since become the premier governing and licensing body for veterinary acupuncturists, with more than 500 licensed practitioners in the United States alone.

injuries and paralysis to arthritis and neurologic, gastrointestinal and reproductive disorders. It is also frequently used as a maintenance procedure for healthy, athletic animals that participate in performance competitions. Many thoroughbred racehorses, for example, receive regular treatments.

Veterinary acupuncturists develop and implement treatment plans based upon each animal's needs, including the recommended frequency of treatment, plus the anatomical points that must be stimulated for successful outcomes. Dealing with acute problems usually involves more frequent treatments in initial stages that then taper off within a few weeks.

While any illness or health problem can be treated using acupuncture alone, if a pet experiences a chronic, recurring health issue, it will likely benefit from a TCM program that also includes complementary, customized, nutritional and behavioral modifications. Veterinary acupuncturists often recommend herbs and nutritional supplements to help improve overall health. The focus is always on achieving long-term balance and harmony and preventing future illness, while treating current ailments.

Depending on their specialized



HELPFUL RESOURCES

Books

Acu-Cat, A Guide to Feline Acupressure

by Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis

The Well-Connected Dog, A Guide to Canine Acupressure

by Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis

Four Paws Five Directions: A Guide to Chinese Medicine for Cats and Dogs

by Dr. Cheryl Schwartz, veterinarian

Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide to Chinese Medicine

by Harriet Beinfield and Efrem Korngold, licensed acupuncturists

National Organizations

American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture

aava.org

American Holistic Veterinary Medicine

ahvma.org

Chi Institute-Dr. Huisheng Xie and Acupuncture Institute

tcvm.com

International Veterinary Acupuncture Society

ivas.org

Other

Video of acupuncture on a dog

Tinyurl.com/7ahksfv

training, vets may introduce homotoxicology (combining homeopathy and acupuncture that injects sterile, homeopathic liquids into acupuncture points). Some vets surgically insert gold bead implants into acupuncture points to provide continuous stimulation of the needed healing energy force; this works well for dogs with congenital defects like hip dysplasia, that often require a lifetime of acupuncture treatments.

Find a Qualified Practitioner

The family veterinarian may have acupuncture certification or be able to recommend a qualified colleague in the area. Some leading national veterinary and acupuncture organization websites provide directories to find qualified practitioners by city and state. Acupuncture is now taught at most U.S. veterinary colleges, and some experts predict that board certification for TCM is fast approaching.

Dr. Jenny Taylor is trained in veterinary acupuncture, herbology, Traditional Chinese Medicine and veterinary homeopathy. Her Creature Comfort Holistic Veterinary Center, in Oakland, California, is an award-winning regional pioneer. She lectures worldwide and donates acupuncture and homeopathy treatment for the Oakland Zoo's wild animals. Connect at CreatureComfort.com and [Facebook.com/creaturecomfort.holisticvet](https://www.facebook.com/creaturecomfort.holisticvet).