

Acupuncture

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a therapy based on the insertion of needles into specific areas of the body in order to relieve pain and improve health. There are two broad approaches to acupuncture; the western approach and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

TCM uses specific acupuncture points to address imbalances in "Qi" (pronounced chi) along neurovascular channels through the body.

Western veterinary acupuncture uses many of the same acupuncture points as TCM but explains needle placement according to what we currently know about the anatomy of the musculoskeletal system and nervous system in animals. The needles stimulate nerves in the muscles and skin around the insertion point. This stimulation triggers the central nervous system to activate its natural pain blocking system. There are also local changes in blood flow to the site which can aid healing and boost the immune system.

Practitioners may use one or other or a combination of the two approaches to achieve optimal results.

When is treatment with acupuncture appropriate?

Acupuncture may be suggested to treat various conditions in animals after a consultation with the vet including:

Musculoskeletal pain (pain originating from muscles and bone) for example osteoarthritis and muscle spasm.

Neurological problems such as fibrocartilagenous embolism and intervertebral disc disease.

Visceral pain (pain from internal organs such as the gut or bladder or reproductive organs)

Urinary problems such as incontinence or urine retention.

Skin complaints such as wound healing, itchiness and compulsive licking.

When should acupuncture not be used?

Acupuncture can often be used when other treatments would be contraindicated. However there are some situations where it may not be advisable to do acupuncture. These would include pre-existing conditions in the patient such as bleeding disorders or immunosuppression. For this reason acupuncture will only be performed on your pet once a full clinical history and permission has been obtained from your veterinary surgeon.

What can I expect during an acupuncture appointment?

On your first appointment I will have received a full medical history from your vet detailing the current health problem and any treatment already given. I will then spend the majority of the first appointment discussing your pet's history and doing a thorough examination. If we agree that acupuncture may be beneficial at that point I will then start the first treatment. I use sterile, single use needles which are very fine. The needles are inserted through the skin and into the target structures. Treatment may involve anywhere from 2 to 16 needles depending on the case. The length of time the needles remain in place varies depending on the individual, from as little as a few seconds up to 20 or 30 minutes. The needles may be stimulated by hand several times during the treatment. If your animal has never had acupuncture before the first treatment will often be brief to assess response and then build up over successive treatments.

What can I expect after the first treatment?

After the first treatment your pet may feel a little sedated. They may sleep more than usual over the next few days or there may be no difference at all. Response varies depending on the sensitivity of the individual and the length of treatment. That is why we start with a short treatment and build up over successive visits.

How many treatments are needed?

Response to treatment varies depending on the individual. We suggest a minimum of 4 treatments for the initial course to assess how your pet is responding. Weekly or twice weekly visits may be recommended depending on the individual case.

After the initial course has been completed we will reassess and create a follow-up plan tailored to your pet. Your veterinary surgeon will receive a complete report of all clinical findings, recommendations and treatments.

What is electroacupuncture?

Electroacupuncture uses a mild electric current to stimulate the acupuncture needles. The electric current causes small vibrations of the needles and muscles which increases the amount of stimulation at that point. It feels like a mild tingling sensation. Electroacupuncture can be used in chronic painful conditions where a higher "dose" of acupuncture is required or for some neurological conditions where more stimulation is needed.