

ACUPUNCTURE

What is it? Acupuncture is the art/medicine of placing very fine needles in specific locations (acupuncture points) on the body. There are over 360 point locations on the body. The points are located on 14 different meridians, which are the channels which the energy and information is thought to flow.

How exactly the information is passed from each point to the rest of the body along the meridians is not perfectly understood, but we do know much more about the points themselves. Scientists have studied the points extensively and found that the exact points are very different from the surrounding tissue in several ways. First, the electrical activity is different: there is lower resistance and higher conductivity (meaning energy can flow more easily). There is also a difference in the cells and make-up of the skin and tissue underneath: there are more mast cells (cells that stimulate local inflammation and send out chemical signals) and more small blood vessels (which pick up and spread those chemical signals). While we have discovered much, there is still much that we don't understand about this ancient medicine.

When do you use it? Acupuncture is very effective for pain and nausea (and is used commonly in human cancer treatment for this reason), but is also a helpful tool in treating many other diseases including immune related problems and heart, kidney and skin diseases. We frequently use it in dogs which have suffered neurologic (nerve) damage. It helps bring the energy flow back to the area that has been damaged and increases the animal's overall strength, stimulating healing. We often find that it helps increase the comfort and energy level of elderly pets that are experiencing difficulty due to arthritis pain.

How do I know if my pet is a candidate for acupuncture? Your pet will need to come in for a full history and examination performed by the veterinarian who practices acupuncture. Since acupuncture is taken from Eastern medicine, some of the pertinent history and behaviors of your dog may not have ever been discussed with you in the past.

Once your pet has been evaluated, an acupuncture treatment can be performed. You will be allowed to stay and watch the treatment. In fact, many pets are more comfortable if their people sit with them on the floor for their treatment. Once the needles are placed, they will be left in for anywhere from 15-25 minutes depending on the age of the pet, chronicity of the disease, and how many other treatments they've had before. Usually the pets will sit quietly during this time because once the needles are placed, the pets can no longer feel them. We will sometimes turn off/down the lights to help them relax - often the treatment itself relaxes them, so they will fall asleep.

Does it hurt? No. The needles are very small in diameter and very pliable. The pets will sometimes react to the needle touching the skin (like a mosquito bite), but once placed, they usually can't feel them. Sometimes they will start to fidget after the needles have been in for a few minutes - this can occur when there is a lot of energy movement caused by the treatment, since pets are very sensitive to energy changes.

How often does it need to be done? With sudden onset diseases (like slipped discs or fractured bones), the response to acupuncture is quick like the disease process. With slower onset diseases (like arthritis or obesity), the response to treatment can take longer. Acupuncture requires a commitment to trying at least 3 treatments depending on the disease. The early treatments are done 2 weeks apart. Once we see a positive response, we will start to stretch out the treatment intervals.

Are there any side effects? Sometimes, due to the intense energy flow caused by the acupuncture treatment, pets are tired for a day afterwards. By the 2nd day though, they are feeling back to normal, and ideally their symptoms will also improve this quickly.

How long does it take? The initial consultation and exam may be over an hour, but the treatment itself is generally 30 minutes or less. You will be able to be with your pet for the entire treatment.

What is electroacupuncture? We will sometimes use an electric current to strengthen the energy flow caused by the acupuncture treatment. Several points are connected to a small electric unit, increasing the current between those two points, we will often use this in neurologic disease or other severe disease to "boost" the treatment. There are several other variations to acupuncture including aquapuncture (where a liquid is injected into the acupuncture point) and moxibustion (where warmth is applied to the needles). We will discuss with you if any of these other methods are more appropriate for your pet,

This is a very broad overview of an ancient and complex type of medicine. If you are interested in learning more, you are welcome to make an appointment for a consultation with your pet, or we can recommend more information sources.