

Acupuncture for Your Pet

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What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is the practice of inserting fine, solid needles into the body to relieve pain or to help restore function.

How does it work?

Acupuncture works by acting on the body's nervous system.

- ✓ In painful conditions (such as arthritis or injury) the needles block the pain signals coming from the painful or injured area and also cause the release of the body's own natural painkillers.
- ✓ In non painful conditions where the body's normal function is disturbed (such as in some bladder and bowel conditions) the needles can help to restore normal function via the nervous system.
- ✓ Acupuncture also has a beneficial effect on wound healing by stimulating nerve and blood vessel growth into the injured area.
- ✓ Acupuncture has an anti-nausea effect which can improve appetite.

Is it safe?

Acupuncture is very safe, in the right hands. Legally it must be performed by a veterinary surgeon.

Which conditions can be treated?

- ✓ Pain is the most common indication for acupuncture. Often this is pain associated with arthritis, but also muscular strains, injuries and back pain can be treated. Remember that animals exhibit pain in many different ways. Read our leaflet entitled "How to recognise pain in your pet" for further information.
- ✓ Functional problems such as constipation and irritable bowel type conditions may also respond.
- ✓ Acupuncture can be used to aid wound healing.
- ✓ Some allergic skin conditions may respond to acupuncture.

Will my pet respond to treatment?

Not all animals or humans are acupuncture responders, but about 80% will be.

Where will treatment take place?

Usually, pets attend the clinic for treatment, however home treatments are possible for animals or owners who have difficulty traveling.

Will it hurt?

Acupuncture needles stimulate different nerves than the ones that cause unpleasant feelings of pain. This stimulation sends messages to the brain to block pain. Some animals will react to the sensation of the needles as if they are expecting pain, but then relax when the pain does not occur.

The needles we use for acupuncture are much finer than the needles usually used for injections and most animals accept them very well. Often they will become visibly relaxed and sleepy during the treatment and appear to be pleased to return to the practice for the next treatment.

What will the treatment involve?

After reviewing your pet's history, Liz will discuss your areas of concern and reasons for presenting your pet for acupuncture.

Your pet will then be given a full examination. Often, when an animal is in pain from a particular area, they alter their posture to protect that and cause secondary strain in many different muscle groups. It is common to find many areas of pain in addition to the expected painful area.

Following the examination, needles will be put into various areas of the body and moved or stimulated a few times. The number of needles used, the length of time they are inserted and the amount of stimulation of the needles will vary depending on your pet's response at the time and following the treatment.

Your pet may become sleepy during the treatment.

What about afterwards?

It is not unusual for pets to go home and sleep deeply for a long time. This is a good sign and indicates that your pet will probably respond well to acupuncture. Don't worry if your pet is not sleepy, this doesn't mean that they will not respond.

Sometimes your pet may seem more lively than usual. This is also a good sign but you should not let them overdo things, it is best to keep them quiet for the rest of the day.

Otherwise, treat your pet normally following acupuncture. You shouldn't change their exercise, diet or medication without discussing it with your vet.

Your pet may show one of three responses to treatment:

1. Occasionally, your pet may seem a little stiffer after treatment. This means that they are likely to respond to the treatment but that the 'dose' of acupuncture was a bit too much. In this case the amount of stimulation can be reduced at the next treatment.
2. You may see no response. This does not mean that your pet will not respond; they may just take a little longer.
3. You may see an improvement. This can occur anytime in the three days after treatment. The signs we are treating may then return before the next treatment. This is fine. After each subsequent treatment the effects should last for longer.

How many treatments will be required?

The usual course is one treatment a week for four to six weeks. After four weeks we will know whether acupuncture is working for your pet. If your pet is responding to treatment after the initial course, the treatment will be tailed off to maintain the effect for as long as possible.

For chronic conditions, the frequency of treatments needed for long term maintenance will depend on the severity of the condition and how well the pet responds.

Referrals

We will need your vet's permission to treat your pet with acupuncture. A referral form is available at the surgery or on the website.