



## Veterinary Acupuncture

by Krisi Erwin DVM, CVA, CCRT



Meet Chip! Sadly, this Weim baby was plagued with Hypertrophic Osteodystrophy (HOD) as a pup and had to undergo several months of therapy with conventional medications, such as steroids and pain medications, to help him recover. While these months were trying for Chip and his new family, his family did everything they could to help him recover more quickly. One of the therapies that Chip's mom and dad pursued was acupuncture. These treatments helped to provide pain management and helped their growing boy to feel better until the HOD resolved. Thankfully, Chip has grown into an active, lovely young man and it would be difficult to know that his puppyhood was so troubled by this painful disease. Chip's case is just one example of how acupuncture can help to treat various canine conditions.

Acupuncture has been used successfully for nearly 4000 years on animals and people to provide preventative medicine as well as to treat diseases and imbalances in the body. More and more veterinarians are learning to use acupuncture, alongside Western medicine, for

various disease conditions. It is not a panacea, or a cure-all, but in certain disease conditions it works well. The following are some basic questions and answers to help familiarize you with acupuncture:

### What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is the insertion of needles into specific points on the body to cause a desired healing effect. Acupuncture can be used as a treatment for many ailments as well as preventive medicine. Modern veterinary acupuncturists use a wide variety of equipment including solid needles, gold beads, electricity, heat, massage and low power lasers to stimulate acupuncture points.

### How does acupuncture work?

According to Chinese medicine, disease is the result of an imbalance of energy in the body. Acupuncture is believed to balance this energy and assist the body to heal disease. In Western terms, acupuncture can assist the body to heal itself by causing certain physiological changes. For example, acupuncture can stimulate nerves, increase blood circulation, relieve muscle spasms, and cause

the release of hormones, such as endorphins (one of the body's pain control chemicals) and cortisol (a natural steroid). Although many of the physiological effects of acupuncture have been studied, many more are still unknown. Further research must be done to discover all of acupuncture's effects and its proper uses in veterinary medicine. While acupuncture is not a cure-all, it can work very well in up to 70-80% of cases (when it is indicated for that condition).

### **What diseases can acupuncture treat?**

Acupuncture is indicated for functional problems such as those involving paralysis, noninfectious inflammation (such as allergies), and pain. For dogs, the following are some general conditions which may be treated with acupuncture:

- Musculoskeletal problems such as arthritis, muscle soreness, or intervertebral disc disease.
- Skin problems such as chronic ear infections, lick granulomas, and allergies.
- Respiratory problems such as laryngeal paralysis and feline asthma.
- Gastrointestinal problems such as diarrhea and constipation.
- Neurologic problems such as seizures, nerve paralysis, and behavioral disorders.
- Sports Medicine needs such as relieving minor sports injuries as they occur and helping to keep muscles and tendons resistant to injury.

### **Is acupuncture safe?**

When administered by a properly trained veterinarian, acupuncture is one of the safest forms of medical treatment for animals. Side effects of acupuncture are rare, but they do exist. An animal's condition

may seem worse for up to 48 hours after a treatment. Other animals may become sleepy or lethargic for 24 hours after acupuncture. These effects are an indication that some physiological changes are developing, and they are most often followed by an improvement in the animal's condition. Caution must be exercised when treating cancer patients since acupuncture theoretically holds the risk of causing tumors to grow by increasing circulation to the tumor.

### **Is acupuncture painful?**

The insertion of acupuncture needles is virtually painless. Needle insertion may cause some sensation, such as tingles, cramps, or numbness which may be uncomfortable to some animals. In all animals, once the needles are in place, there should be no pain. Most animals become very relaxed and may even become sleepy during treatment.

### **How long do acupuncture treatments last and how often are they given?**

The length and frequency of treatments varies with the condition of the patient and the method of stimulation used by the veterinary acupuncturist. In general, the acupuncture needles are left in place for 20 minutes although the time may vary. A simple acute problem, such as a sprain, may require only one treatment, whereas more severe or chronic ailments may need several or several dozen treatments. Patients often start with 1 treatment per week for 4-6 weeks. A positive response is usually seen after the first to third treatments. Maintenance treatments are scheduled to maintain the longest possible symptom free interval. Some dogs will require treatments every 2-3 weeks and others may need as few as 2-4 treatments per year. Your veterinary acupuncturist might

also recommend including other treatments such as herbs for your pet to help enhance the effects of acupuncture.

### **How do I choose a veterinary acupuncturist?**

Veterinary acupuncturists must be licensed veterinarians. A veterinarian is in the best position to diagnose a pet's health problem and then to determine whether he or she is likely to benefit from an acupuncture treatment versus medical or surgical intervention. Veterinary acupuncturists should also have formal training in the practice of acupuncture for animals. The more your veterinarian knows about the traditional Chinese philosophies and Western scientific basis for

acupuncture, the more confident you can be that your pet will be treated properly. You can check out the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society ([www.ivas.org](http://www.ivas.org)) or the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association ([www.ahvma.org](http://www.ahvma.org)) to find a trained veterinarian in your community and to learn more!

*Krisi Erwin DVM, CVA, CCRT, is a veterinarian working in Loudoun County, VA. She owns Wholistic Paws Veterinary Services, a house-call practice that specializes in the following services: acupuncture, rehabilitation, pet hospice and home euthanasia. Dr. Erwin can be contacted at [wecare@wholisticpawsvet.com](mailto:wecare@wholisticpawsvet.com) if you have any questions!*

---

**It's never too early to start thinking about the  
Blue Ribbon...**

**Remember, the National is in October this year, so  
that means the judges will get their Blue Ribbon  
copies well in advance of the National show.**

**Deadline for all submissions is May 1, 2012.  
Don't miss out!**