

Questions & Answers About Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a part of TCVM (Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine). TCVM incorporates not only acupuncture, but Chinese herbs, food therapy (based on Chinese modalities) and Tui-na, which is Chinese massage.

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture consists of placing a needle at a specific point that stimulates the vessels, nerves, and /or lymphatics. With each of these systems are like an electrical network of wires from a power plant to all of the homes in the area. This allows the acupuncturist to place a needle at the toe on the back leg for effects at the head. Biologically the stimulation of these points will release endorphins, anti-inflammatory mediators and hormones.

Acupuncture has been practiced on humans, horses, cows and swine for 2,000 years. The use of this modality in dogs, cats and exotics has only been in the past 50-60 years.

Is there more than one type of acupuncture?

Yes, there are many different acupuncture techniques. The most common techniques used in small animals are dry needles, acupressure, aqua-puncture, and electro-acupuncture.

Dry needle technique- is what most people think of when they think of acupuncture. This is where the needles are placed in the patient for a specific period of time. Many patients look like porcupines.

Acupressure- is the stimulation of acupuncture points using pressure and massage.

Aquapuncture- is where a fluid, usually B12 and saline are injected at the points. The purpose is to provide stimulation to the points for a longer period of time. The points are stimulated until all of the fluid is absorbed.

Electro-acupuncture- is where an electrical current is sent through specific pairs of points. The needles are first placed, then the electrical current is attached. The electrical current provides the strongest stimulation available.

What conditions can be treated with acupuncture?

The most common conditions treated with acupuncture are arthritis and disc disease. But acupuncture and TCVM can be used with any condition that is not an emergency/surgical case. Acupuncture can be used to help recover after surgeries, treat seizures and other neurological conditions that there is no response or treatment in western medicine. Acupuncture can be used in conjunction with western medicine.

How many treatments are required, and how often will my pet need treatment?

This depends. It all depends on the problem and the patient's response to treatment. For acute cases, only one or two treatments may be needed. For chronic cases, treatment may be needed life long. For chronic or cases that will be life long, I usually recommend 3-5 treatments a week apart. As the patient improves the treatments may be spaced out. For some conditions such as seizures, that will be affected by the phases of the moon, treatment will be before the new and/or full moon. Some patients, with disc disease that will be life long, may need frequent treatments during flare ups, but spaced out every 1 to 3 months for maintenance and prevention.

What can I expect with an acupuncture visit with my pet?

A TCVM/acupuncture exam is much more intense than a regular exam. We look at the basic things such as gum color, eyes and ears, listen to the heart and palpate (feel the abdomen). But we also pay closer attention to other things, how the pulse feels, color of the tongue, temperature of the nose and ears. We will also ask more specific questions about eating and drinking habits, sleeping, temperature and surface preferences. The same physical and questions are asked on each visit. Things that may not mean much to a Western veterinarian, or information that the veterinarian may not know how to classify.

All of this is to determine what is known in Chinese medicine as a pattern. This is what all treatments in Chinese medicine is based on. So it is even more important for the doctor to see the patient than in western medicine. This means when the pattern changes, the treatment changes.

Once the pattern is determined, then the doctor will treat the patient with whatever acupuncture treatment technique is determined to be the best for that patient. It may only be one or all of the techniques listed above.

There may also be diet recommendations, exercise and massage techniques recommended, and/ or herbal formulas. All of these modalities, help to continue the effects of the acupuncture after the needles are removed. This ultimately aids in helping to space out the treatments.

How long are the acupuncture appointments?

Each acupuncture appointment is 1 hour long. This is to allow time to do the in depth physical, ask questions and determine the pattern. The actual treatment itself with the needles is 10-20 minutes depending on the patient and the condition being treated.

Why are acupuncture visit so much more expensive than regular veterinary visits?

The cost of an acupuncture/TCVM visit is to pay to the doctor's expertise. The acupuncture/TCVM exam is much more involved than a regular physical exam. The patient's pattern must be determined in order to treat the patient effectively.