

Amazing Acupuncture Cases

By Dr. Christine Woodford D.V.M.

As a veterinarian certified in Animal Chiropractic and Acupuncture who practices exclusively in these areas, I am often asked to define acupuncture and to explain how it works.

Basically, acupuncture is an ancient Chinese therapy based on the theory that energy flows through channels, known as meridians, located throughout the body. There are twelve major meridians on each side of the body and each is associated with an organ system. When the flow of energy through these regions is blocked, animals are more susceptible to pain and/or disease.

Acupuncture therapy involves stimulation of specific points on the meridians using various methods to release the flow of energy. Most typically small, fine needles are gently inserted into the body. Research has shown that the acupuncture points and meridians follow major nerve pathways, blood vessels, and the lymphatic system. Blood samples taken on animals before and after therapy show that acupuncture increases the circulation of cortisol, serotonin, and endorphins. These internal anti-inflammatory agents and neurotransmitters stimulate the body to heal itself.

Acupuncture has been used on animals in the United States for about 40 years. I have been doing acupuncture on animals for two years and have seen amazing results. Although I have received bruises from some of my most "appreciative" chiropractic patients, my worst injuries have occurred during acupuncture treatments. In other words, the horse's reaction often indicates that something good is happening in the horse's body even though it sometimes leaves mine decorated with nature's tattoos. While I could do without such injuries myself, they often result because horses can be very reactive when there is a big release of energy caused by the acupuncture needles. One of my most memorable acupuncture injuries was from an equine patient that I was treating in the Des Moines area.

The horse stood well when I adjusted him and as I inserted needles into his back and his neck. However, when I inserted a

needle into BL-60, an acupuncture point by his left hock, he rapidly and unexpectedly kicked out and clipped my right thumb. Immediately, I felt a deep aching pain. I took some Ibuprofen, but it did not take away the pain. This was a problem since I had two more horses to work on that evening. I tried to pick up the next horse's foot only to find that I could not grab the leg with my sore thumb.

With the owner looking on expectantly, I pondered how best to get the job done. Glancing at the table where my acupuncture needles were, I suddenly remembered learning about LI-4, a powerful acupuncture point on the human hand between the thumb and index finger. I thought, "What's good for the goose, or gelding as it were, might just be good for the gander, or veterinarian. What do I have to lose?" So I needled myself. Instantly, the sensation of pain in my thumb traveled down to the point and then vanished. The daughter of the barn owner was admittedly a little freaked out that I was working on her horse with a needle stuck in my hand. Nevertheless, I was able to treat the last two horses.

On another occasion I worked on a pony that had suffered an acute, abnormal allergic reaction two weeks prior to my visit. The reaction caused swelling of the head and a stiff neck. Cervical films taken by the owner's regular veterinarian revealed a misalignment between the C5-C6 neck vertebrae. After two weeks of conventional antibiotic and anti-inflammatory therapy, the pony could only lift her head to the level of her knees. I treated the pony with both chiropractic and acupuncture. The pony was also treated by a massage therapist. One week post-treatment, I re-checked the pony to discover she was enjoying a 40% improvement in the mobility in her neck. She was able to carry her head level with her shoulders and had an increased range of lateral motion. We repeated the chiropractic and acupuncture treatments and started the mare on some Chinese herbs called "body sore" that increase energy flow throughout the body and relieve body soreness. When I rechecked the pony two weeks later, she had full range of motion in her neck.

One of my most rewarding treatments took place while I was at a horse show this fall. I was walking through the barn and came across a young lady sobbing and hovering over a little dog. About 4 minutes before, the 10-month-old miniature pincher had run into a chair and was knocked out cold. The people around him thought for sure that the dog was dying because it had exhibited parasympathetic responses such as urination and defecation. They asked if there was anything that I could do. I examined the dog and discovered that he still had a weak heart beat and was breathing, although irregularly. I asked the owner's permission to perform acupuncture on the dog. The first acupuncture point that I treated was GV-26, or the resuscitation point, on the end of the nose. Immediately, the dog lifted its head. I inserted about 10 needles into various points on the dog including a "ting" point on each foot. Each meridian starts or ends at a "ting" point on the distal limb. Treating these points opens the channel and allows the energy to flow more freely throughout the meridian. When I needled the last foot, the dog got up and walked straight to its owner's arms. Even I was surprised to see the acupuncture revive the unconscious dog so quickly. Onlookers were amazed and the owner seemed to think that I was some kind of miracle worker. Miracle worker I am not, but experiences such as those I've described confirm my belief in the merits of acupuncture.

The goal of acupuncture is to alleviate tight, sore muscles and repair strained tendons, ligaments, and joints. Studies have shown that acupuncture stimulates the release of important anti-inflammatory mechanisms and increases circulation throughout the body. Acupuncture can help the body heal itself, and reduce the amount of drugs needed, thus reducing the unwanted side effects and pharmaceutical costs. For maximum health and benefits integrate acupuncture into an animal's regular healthcare plan.