

Pet Care Advice

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is available by appointment with our specially trained vets
Penny Clarke MRCVS and Penny Graham MRCVS.

A brief history of acupuncture

There is evidence that acupuncture has been used for thousands of years. Sharpened stones and pieces of bone were the tools of choice. Things have progressed significantly since then although the basic principles remain unchanged. Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine have a long history of using acupuncture to treat a wide range of painful conditions. Over recent years the benefits of acupuncture have been recognised by Western medics and vets making it a popular treatment option for many patients.

How does it work?

When suffering from injury or disease the body is capable of producing many pain relieving chemicals. These internal pain-killers help to reduce the activity of the nerves which are responsible for alerting the brain to the presence of injury or pain. In cases of chronic discomfort it becomes more difficult for the body to wind down its own pain mechanisms in this way.

Acupuncture works by stimulating nerve fibres and muscle tissue so more of the body's own pain relieving methods are activated.

What conditions can be treated?

In western veterinary medicine the most common use of acupuncture is in treating painful musculo-skeletal conditions such as **chronic arthritis**. Sudden, **acute injuries** may also be treated with acupuncture and it is particularly useful for **muscular damage**.

Occasionally **chronic skin problems** may also improve following acupuncture treatment. In some instances **wound healing** is improved following acupuncture treatment.

In a lot of cases we will use acupuncture in addition to the animal's usual medicine. In some cases, however, acupuncture may be a safe alternative when certain medications are contraindicated.

What happens during a treatment?

The animal is examined to identify specific areas of pain and discomfort. The vet will ask questions regarding the pet's routine at home and whether any changes in this have been noticed.

The vet will use specialist sterile needles placed in areas specific to the condition being treated. Most animals tolerate needle placement well.

Once the needles are in place they remain in position for 5 to 10 minutes, during which time the vet may adjust the needles for maximum effect.

Humans report acupuncture needles cause various sensations including tingling and warmth in the treated area *and it is assumed animals have a similar experience. Most pets are entirely comfortable during this procedure.* Occasionally, animals do not feel comfortable with the sensations they experience following needle placement. In these cases acupuncture is discontinued.

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What happens after treatments?

Animals all respond differently following a treatment.

- In cases of lameness, this may appear worse for a couple of days followed by a gradual improvement.
- Some animals find the experience very relaxing and are quite tired when they get home so may need to rest.
- Conversely some animals display excitement with higher energy levels when they reach home.

How many treatments are required?

The number of sessions required varies between individuals and depends upon the condition being treated. For most animals it is recommended to complete at least 4 sessions before deciding how effective the treatment is.

The frequency of sessions may be reduced or discontinued if the animal has not responded.

A **30 minute appointment** will be scheduled for the first appointment and then **20 minutes** for subsequent treatments.

Is acupuncture safe?

In human and animal medicine acupuncture has been used for many years with very few problems.

By law acupuncture treatment for animals must be carried out by a qualified veterinary surgeon.

The vets carrying out the treatments have completed further training enabling them to do so safely.

All of the needles are sterile and used only once. Infections in human and animal acupuncture are rare.

