



Acupuncture As An Alternative

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An increasing number of veterinarians are using non-traditional/alternative therapies and combining them with traditional western medicine approaches to treat our equine patients. Acupuncture is one such alternative therapy and its popularity and use in equine medicine has grown exponentially. Many horse owners have sought out this treatment modality for their equine companion after having been successfully treated with acupuncture themselves following treatment failure using solely traditional western medicine. Despite the fact that veterinary acupuncture has been in practice for over 2000 years, skeptics still remain. This article is intended to define what acupuncture is, how it works and specific uses for acupuncture in horses.

Acupuncture is the stimulation of a specific point resulting in a therapeutic effect. Research has shown that the acupoints are located in areas on the body where there is a high density of free nerve endings, arterioles, lymphatic vessels and mast cells. Ancient Chinese medicine describes the acupoints as sites where Qi, (pronounced 'Chee') the vital energy of the body, is gathered and distributed. The points are found on 14 major meridians or channels that govern the flow of Qi and blood through the body. Ancient Chinese medicine believes that the health of the body is dependent on the free flow of Qi and blood through the body at all times to maintain a balance of Yin and Yang. Alternatively, the disruption of the flow of Qi and blood through the meridians is called stagnation and results in pain. This stagnation can lead to an imbalance of Yin and Yang leaving the body susceptible to pathogens and disease. Acupuncture stimulation restores the flow of Qi and blood, giving the body the energy to heal itself and bring Yin and Yang back into balance.

The acupoints can be stimulated in a variety of ways. The most traditional method is by dry needling. Other approaches include, applying heat at the acupoint sites known as moxibustion, or aqua-acupuncture which involves injecting blood or other non-irritating substance such as Vitamin B at the site. Another common method is the use of electro-acupuncture, where a small electric current is passed between pairs of acupuncture needles that are inserted into a specific acupoint. Some acupuncture practitioners may use a medical laser to stimulate the point or they may simply apply digital pressure without the use of needles.

Many research studies have demonstrated that the stimulation of the acupoints results in the bodies release of Beta-endorphins, serotonin, and norepinephrine that ultimately lead to pain relief. Other confirmed therapeutic effects of acupuncture include having an anti-inflammatory effect, improved microcirculation, and stimulation of the nervous, immune, reproductive, and gastro-intestinal systems of the body.

Acupuncture is a very safe medical procedure when performed by a qualified practitioner. Very few side effects have been reported. In horses, acupuncture is beneficial in management of musculoskeletal problems such as lameness associated with muscle/tendon/ligament soreness, back pain, and arthritis. Additionally it has successfully been used in cases of neurological dysfunction such as facial and radial nerve paralysis, and early cases of laryngeal hemiplegia; as well as in cases of horses experiencing reproductive challenges and gastrointestinal disorders such as colic and diarrhea. Acupuncture is useful in horses with behavioral problems and can improve chronic conditions such as PPID (Cushings), RAO (Heaves), and Anhidrosis (non-sweating). It is important to remember that acupuncture does not have to be a resource used only in horses with injury or illness but rather can be very valuable as a preventative therapy and to improve performance in healthy horses.

Contact Brandon Equine Medical Center at 813-643-7177 or email info@brandonequine.com with any questions regarding this topic.

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