Acupuncture as an Alternative Therapy in Dogs & Cats

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Traditional Chinese medicine has used acupuncture to treat a wide variety of conditions for about 3,500 years. Acupuncture is said to stimulate the body's natural healing processes which in turn help the body heal itself. Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners believe that acupuncture stimulates the flow of energy forces that nourish tissues, stimulate blood flow, and enhance the body's systems. Acupuncture has been used both as a preventative measure and to help treat diseases. According to ancient Chinese medical theory, the life force (called *qi* or *ch'i*) flows through the body via 14 invisible channels known as meridians. They regulate all physical and mental processes. Opposing forces within the body, called yin and yang, must be balanced to keep *ch'i* flowing properly. The meridians run deep within the body's tissues and organs, surfacing at some 360 places identified as acupuncture points, sometimes called acupoints. Certain meridians are identified with organs such as the bladder or liver, and the points all along such meridians are believed capable of affecting the associated internal organ. Stimulating these points is said to balance and restore the flow of *ch'i*.

The word acupuncture is derived from the Latin 'acus' needle and 'pungo' puncture. The puncture refers to the insertion of tiny needles at very specific points on the surface of the body. The needles used are smooth and solid and very thin. Some people say they feel a brief slight sensation upon the insertion of the needle into the precise acupuncture point. The depth of insertion, type of stimulation, and duration of treatment vary according to the disease or the condition being treated. Needles should be sterile and only used once.

In modern veterinary acupuncture, multiple systems of treatment are used. These include the classical needle alone, needles used in conjunction with electrical stimulation, or stimulation using a specific type of laser. Gold beads, surgical staples, or magnets are sometimes put into acupuncture points to provide permanent stimulation.

Many western theories exist to try to explain the reported effects of acupuncture; however, no one theory explains all the effects. One thing specifically is known: acupuncture does cause the release of endorphins, compounds that have physiological effects resembling morphine.

In humans, acupuncture is most commonly used for the treatment of pain, paresis, and paralysis. Acupuncture helps provide short-term relief of pain. In some human studies, long-term relief has occurred as well. Patients may show a better response after each treatment or a good response which lasts for a short period of time and increasingly longer on each subsequent treatment. Acupuncture should not be expected to cure an underlying problem. Human research is underway to determine for which physical problems acupuncture works well.

Research studies on the effects of acupuncture on animals have not yet been performed, but anecdotal information suggests it may be helpful in certain conditions. Acupuncture has been used in the treatment of pain, hip dysplasia, chronic digestive disturbances, lick granuloma, epilepsy, and other miscellaneous conditions in pets. Some pet owners have noted an improvement in attitude in their pets before any physical improvement is seen. This may be due to a reduction in pain or some unknown factor.

For more information, you may wish to contact:

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