



HeartFire Veterinary Acupuncture

& Holistic Health Care

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What can you and your pet expect at your first HeartFire appointment!

Below is a list of frequently asked questions related to an examination and treatment session in Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine. This information sheet should help prepare you and your pet for the initial consultation and therapy. Please do not hesitate to contact me if additional questions remain following review of this information sheet!

What is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture is the practice of inserting small needles into the skin along specific points, or acupuncture points, along the body. These acupuncture points are located along channels, or meridians, and carry energy or Qi (pronounced 'chee') to specific locations for healing properties and various effects. Acupuncture is believed to have originated in China around the Stone Age and has been used in animals for over 3000 years. Originally developed in the veterinary field to cure the Emperor's horses of various ailments, acupuncture is now utilized for various conditions across all species large and small, domestic to exotic.

For which conditions is acupuncture indicated?

Acupuncture is generally thought of as having a place in the management of acute or chronic pain and musculoskeletal disorders such as arthritis, muscle atrophy or degeneration. However, various indications for acupuncture exist in the treatment of many other medical conditions:

- Chronic diseases, such as kidney, liver or heart failure
- Skin ailments and allergies
- Behavioral disorders
- Endocrine diseases such as Thyroid, Diabetes, Cushing's or Addison's disease
- Cancer support and side effects chemotherapy
- Neurologic conditions causing paralysis or difficulty walking, as well as seizures or changes in mentation
- Gastrointestinal disorders such as IBD, diarrhea, nausea or vomiting
- Maintenance of health and decreasing the use of traditional medications for chronic disease

Who is licensed to perform Veterinary Acupuncture?

A Certified Veterinary Acupuncturist (CVA) is a veterinarian, or veterinary student nearing completion of their veterinary curriculum, who has completed extensive training in veterinary acupuncture, indications and treatment modalities, as well as their traditional veterinary training. A few different institutions and training programs exist across the country, which focus on different aspects of Acupuncture or Chinese Medicine. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recognizes acupuncture and other integrative therapies as 'the administration of a treatment or method to an animal designed to impact that animal's health, and as such, qualifies as the practice of veterinary medicine.' Therefore, a licensed veterinarian who is also a CVA is recommended to provide treatment to your pet.

Is it safe?

Acupuncture is one of the safest forms of medical treatment when administered by an appropriately trained veterinarian. Very few side effects exist with acupuncture. Occasionally, your pet may seem worse for up to 48 hours following a treatment session. Other animals may become sleepy or lethargic for about 24 hours following therapy. These effects are rare, but when they occur, they indicate that physiological changes are occurring and are most often followed by an improvement in the patient's condition and energy level.

The only real contraindications that exist in TCVM are related to electro-acupuncture, or the usage of energy to stimulate acupuncture needles. Some conditions where electro-acupuncture is contraindicated include pregnancy, seizure disorders, heart disease and certain types of tumors. If any of these conditions exist in your pet, please inform the acupuncturist so that she may best adjust your pet's treatment protocol.

Does it hurt?

For most patients, the insertion of the acupuncture needles is virtually painless. For some animals, very mild pain is associated with passing the needle through the skin. In all animals, including humans, once the needles are placed, there should be no pain. Most animals become very relaxed, many even fall asleep. Some sensations can occur, such as tingling, numbness or local contraction of muscles around the needles, but most human patients report a feeling of heaviness and sedation which frequently causes relaxation and comfort for our patients throughout treatment. I also use a cold laser to stimulate acupuncture points if it is preferable to the patient.

How quickly can I expect results and how many treatments are recommended?

Results are frequently noted within minutes to hours following treatment. For some acute conditions such as intervertebral disc disease, nausea, vomiting, fever, or pain, clinical signs can be alleviated as quickly as they appear. For chronic conditions, which take a much longer time to develop, multiple treatments sessions are required to notice small improvements over time.

It is recommended for any given condition, that a minimum of 3 treatment sessions be tried before determining if Acupuncture will work for your pet. Based on the nature of your pet's condition and the severity of their clinical signs, treatments may be recommended anywhere from a few times a week to every 2-6 months. Initially, most patients are recommended to return for recheck exam and a treatment every 2 weeks, until improvement in clinical signs is noted. Over time, these sessions are spread out until maintenance appointments every 3-6 months are sufficient. Treatment intensity can be adjusted in order to accommodate schedule availability, finances and travel schedules.

What does a consultation and treatment session entail?

Initial consultation involves a review of the intake paperwork you brought with you including history, HeartFire physical exam, tongue and pulse diagnosis, complete acupuncture treatment as well as any other indicated treatments such as electro-acupuncture, aqua-acupuncture, massage, physical therapy suggestions, food therapy suggestions or at home treatment recommendations. Initial consultation and treatment will take about an hour from start to finish and recheck examinations should last about 30-45 minutes. Recheck examination will include discussion of progression of disease or changes in condition as well as all required treatments.

What if my pet is uncooperative?

Will my pet need to be sedated? If a patient is uncooperative, fractious, or aggressive, adjustments can be made to any treatment protocol so that your pet may still benefit without anyone getting hurt. In some instances, your pet may only tolerate a few needles inserted, or only in a few areas. In other cases, recommendations for diet change, Chinese herbs, or massage techniques can be discussed so that treatment can still be initiated, even though a typical session could not be performed. Sedation is never used, as it compromises some of the beneficial effects of acupuncture, including endorphin, enkephalin and serotonin release.

Can my pet eat breakfast or dinner before an appointment?

Although there are no specific feeding guidelines before an acupuncture session, we recommend feeding at least one meal before their appointment, but not within 2 hours of a treatment session. This will prevent any possible nausea or indigestion caused by a full stomach during treatment.

Are there things that I can do at home to help my pet?

Definitely! We encourage integration of all Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine modalities to promote healing, wellness and balance. Massage, herbal therapy, food therapy and exercise encompass the remaining four modalities of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine other than Acupuncture. A portion of your session will include recommendations and activities or treatments that you can perform at home to maximize your pet's treatment and healing.