

Ask the vet

Veterinary Acupuncture

By: Rose DiLeva, VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA

Question:

Can acupuncture be helpful to pets?

Answer:

Yes, acupuncture can be very helpful in all companion animals, not only as a means of treatment but, more importantly, as a preventative means of keeping them healthier and happier for the longest time possible. Acupuncture has proven beneficial in the following conditions in my experience (plus many more): asthma, allergies, arthritis, anxiety / behavior issues, musculoskeletal problems, sprains, strains, muscle spasms, bursitis, tendonitis, hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, urinary diseases, neuralgia, disc problems, spondylosis, intervertebral disc problems, skin conditions, kidney conditions, liver diseases, various types of cancer, pain management, immune system conditions, the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation, Lyme disease, chronic and acute diarrhea or constipation, inflammatory bowel disease, hind end weakness, wobbler disease, pulmonary problems such as bronchitis, pneumonia, and cardiac support.

Question:

How long do acupuncture treatments in pets last?

Answer:

Acupuncture treatment time depends on the condition or conditions being treated, as well as, the age of the pet. Generally speaking, however, dry needles are kept in place between 5 and 20 minutes in my office. Most of the animals get very relaxed, yawn, and often fall asleep. Acupuncture, by nature, releases some of the body's natural endorphins causing them to relax and enjoy their treatment.

Question:

Is catnip safe to give my cat?

Answer:

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) is a member of the Mint family. It grows readily in North America. Its primary medicinal activities have been to expel intestinal gas, as a sedative, antispasmodic, mild diuretic, helps to alleviate vomiting and most commonly, a feline euphoric. It commonly is placed in cat toys because in most cats it produces a euphoric and calming effect due to an ingredient in the plant called nepetalactone. It should be avoided in pregnant cats.

Question:

How many litter boxes should I have for my two cats?

Answer:

I recommend one litter pan per cat plus one more. This may sound like a lot but, in fact, some cats will only urinate in one box and pass feces in another. Also, some are reluctant to go where others have gone before them. This is why it is very important to clean out litter pans every day. I have seven cats and ten litter pans that are cleaned each day. I have seen cases through the years in which, after much questioning and ruling out medical problems, a cat starts to urinate or defecate outside the litter box. The problem is rectified by adding another litter box or two or changing the kind of litter used. Some cats do not like clay, clumping or scented litter. Cats, like people, have likes and dislikes and this applies to “bathroom” facilities as well.

Question: Should I leave dry food down all day and night for my pets? They are strictly indoors except for walks. My cat has play time on our balcony. Of course we play with them with their toys when home but I’m not sure that’s enough exercise.

Answer: After 20 plus years in practice, I have found that leaving food available all day is not a good idea. Primarily, because digestion actually starts in the mouth with the enzymes present in saliva. The fact that digestion starts in the mouth keeps our pets from just lying around the home and getting into a habit of walking by the food bowl and taking a few mouthfuls of food just because it’s there and becomes a habit. Overweight pets are also predisposed to many other diseases as they age. My recommendation is to put food (dry and canned) down at the same time in the morning and evening for an hour or so. This works well and our pets adjust to the change quickly and have those juices flowing in their mouth when they should, which is when they hear you opening the can or bag of dry food just before putting it down. In a future article I will make recommendations about what to avoid in pet foods and why.

Note: Dr. DiLeva is a University of Pennsylvania graduate and practices alternative and conventional veterinary medicine. She is a certified veterinary acupuncturist and a certified veterinary chiropractor. All responses given are based on her knowledge and experience in clinical veterinary practice. She can be reached at the Animal Wellness Center at 610-558-1616 for appointments, speaking engagements or telephone consultations. Her web site is www.altpetdoc.com

ASK THE VET

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Acupuncture in Pets

Question: Please tell me what medical conditions acupuncture can be helpful to in pets. Can any veterinarian do acupuncture?

Answer: Let me start by enlightening you to the additional education necessary to be a qualified veterinary acupuncturist. The first requirement is to be a doctor of veterinary medicine. That entails four years of veterinary medical education after four years of college. My personal acupuncture training was through The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society. This is an international organization with rules, regulations and standards that apply worldwide. This education includes lengthy classroom studies, on-hands practical examinations on dogs, cats and horses and written case reports, the quality of which must be eligible for publication in a professional veterinary journal. Additionally, to complete the course, one must do an “internship” with a certified veterinary acupuncturist in their practice. If one were to compare college credit hours to this scenario, it would be the equivalent of a PhD degree. A qualified graduate veterinary acupuncturist can be found at their web site www.IVAS.org.

Under no circumstances should a human acupuncturist practice acupuncture on an animal. Humans are bipedal (two-legged) while most companion animals I treat are quadruped (four-legged). While the meridians and the principals of Traditional Chinese Medicine are the same, there are differences with respect to the exact locations of certain acupuncture points. The transposition of these points is where the knowledge of veterinary acupuncture differs from human acupuncture. These very specific locations are of ultimate importance, for these are the points that can make the difference between treatment success and treatment failure.

Acupuncture can benefit the following conditions: arthritis, allergies, asthma, bronchitis, dermatitis, hip dysplasia, degenerative joint disease, spondylosis, gastrointestinal issues (vomiting, diarrhea, colitis, inflammatory bowel disease), cancer, seizures, kidney disease, liver disease, thyroid disease, musculoskeletal problems (sprains, strains, acute trauma, disc disease), urinary and fecal incontinence, pain management, cystitis (bladder infections, feline urologic syndrome, bladder stones), and much more.

Acupuncture is the placement of tiny needles into specific points on the body for the purposes of healing. The acupuncture needles are very thin and usually made of stainless steel. The needles are very flexible and readily bend in any direction. They range in length from 2-3 millimeters to many inches. Typically the shorter needles are placed in areas on the body that have thinner layers of muscle, such as the area above and adjacent to the backbone, the wrist or the ankle. Longer needles, on the other hand, are placed in muscles adjacent to and overlying the hips and thighs.

The World Health Organization recommends acupuncture as an effective treatment for over forty-two medical conditions, including allergies, respiratory conditions, gastrointestinal disorders, nervous system conditions, gynecological problems, disorders of the eyes, nose and throat, headaches, chronic pain associated with arthritis and degenerative joint disease, and as an adjunct in patients suffering from cancer and AIDS.

Dr. DiLeva is a 1987 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's school of veterinary medicine. She practices alternative and conventional veterinary medicine. Dr. DiLeva is a certified veterinary acupuncturist and a certified veterinary chiropractor. She can be reached at her Animal Wellness Center in Chadds Ford, Pa at 610-558-1616 for appointments, speaking engagements and telephone consultations. Her web site is www.altpetdoc.com