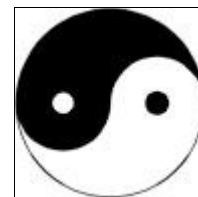


## An Introduction to Veterinary Acupuncture

Matthew W Lovell, DVM



Over six months ago, I began my acupuncture certification by starting a course at the Chi Institute in Reddick, Florida, near Ocala. I decided to get certification because I felt that acupuncture could be a valid addition to my practice and could improve results in clinical cases. After 26 years of practice, I realize there are many ways to address disease and lameness and that there are many conditions where we are limited by response to treatment. In the right hands and with proper training, and combined with traditional “western” medicine, acupuncture can be viewed as a valid treatment option. The five session, 160 hour course, combined with many hours of study and practice should be a great introduction to acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM)

Acupuncture can be defined as the stimulation of specific points on the body (called acupoints) by specific methods, to get specific therapeutic effects. During certification, we will learn about 250 equine points. Modern research shows these points are located near high densities of free nerve endings, mast cells, small arterioles and lymphatic vessels. A great number of studies show stimulation of acupoints induces release of beta endorphins, serotonin, and other transmitters. Therefore acupuncture for pain relief is well supported by scientific studies. Acupuncture has been practiced in China on humans and animals for thousands of years. The first veterinary acupuncture book, “Bole’s Canon of Veterinary Acupuncture” was published around 659 BC to 621 BC.

Acupoints may be stimulated in a variety of ways. These include dry needling, moxibustion (stimulation with heat), aqu-acupuncture (injection of points, usually with vitamin B-12 solution), and electro-stimulation. The goal is always the same, to restore the normal flow of Qi (pronounced chee). Qi is the life force or vital energy that flows throughout the body 24 hours a day. Whenever Qi flow is interrupted, disease can occur. Blockage of Qi flow causes pain. Acupuncture stimulation resolves this blockage, freeing the flow of Qi and allowing the body to heal itself.

Acupuncture is very safe when performed by a qualified practitioner. In most states only licensed veterinarians are eligible to practice acupuncture on animals. Very few side effects have been found in clinical cases when performed properly, but knowledge of potential contra-indications is important in case selection.

An acupuncture treatment may take 20-60 minutes, and could cost \$50 -\$200. Some acute conditions could respond to a single treatment. A series of 3-10 treatments can resolve many chronic problems. Some degenerative conditions may require monthly treatments over time.

Numerous studies show acupuncture may aid in pain relief, regulation of GI motility, immune-regulation, hormone and reproductive regulation, and control of febrile conditions (fever). Some conditions that could be treated with acupuncture include:

- **Musculoskeletal problems:** muscle soreness, back pain, disc problems, arthritis or degenerative joint disease.
- **Neurologic disorders:** seizure, laryngeal hemiplegia (roarers), facial and radial nerve paralysis.
- **Gastrointestinal disorders:** diarrhea, gastric ulcers, colic, vomiting or reflux, constipation and impaction.
- **Other chronic conditions:** anhidrosis, heaves, Cushing’s or equine metabolic disorder, hypothyroidism, infertility, renal failure, geriatric weakness, skin problems.
- **Performance enhancement and prevention of disease.**

In my opinion, the best place for acupuncture is as part of an integrated approach with western medicine. Sometimes the use of Chinese Herbal Medications is added for support of acupuncture or on occasion, in lieu of it. Herbs are frequently used in situations that have not responded to traditional Western veterinary medicine. Occasionally certain foods may be added or eliminated based on TCVM principals.

**Please contact Lovell Equine Clinic with questions or to determine if acupuncture might be beneficial for your horse’s condition.**