

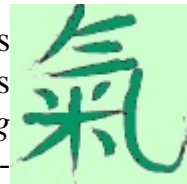
**Acupuncture for Animals**  
**ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE**  
**Information Sheet A-WS142/09**  
**Christopher Day - Veterinary Surgeon**

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**ACUPUNCTURE FOR ANIMALS**

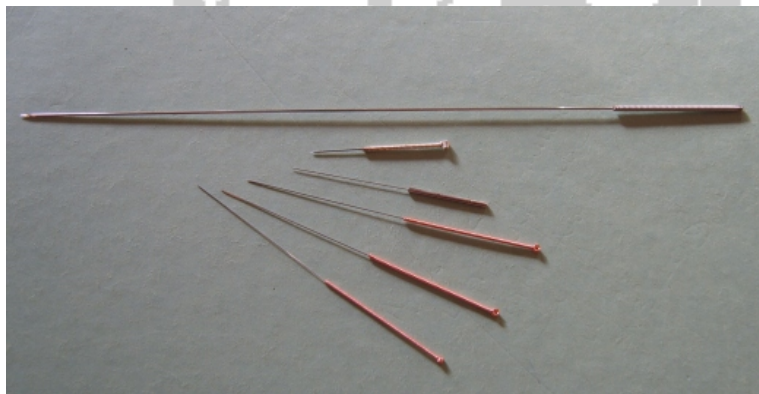
**History**

Acupuncture, as part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), owes its origins to the Ancient Chinese, dating from anything up to 4,000 years ago. The oldest medical text book we know is the *Huang-ti Nei-jing Su-wen*, which describes the philosophy and rationale in 'question-and-answer' form.



Traditional Chinese Medicine advocates the use of [herbs](#), nutritional input (i.e. [diet](#)) and lifestyle modification, as essential companions to acupuncture. This may explain some of the failures of the modern type of acupuncture that is commonly performed in a 'non-holistic' and strictly reductionist 'Western' way.

See also: [Moxibustion](#).



The theory behind acupuncture is rooted in Taoist and yin-yang culture, although some modern practitioners shun these traditional roots. Energy, composed of a balance between yin and yang, flows through the body in meridians or channels. These channels

are related to the internal organs and disease can reach those organs via their meridian. Imbalances between yin and yang, or interruptions or disturbances in the flow of energy ('Qi'), will also give rise to disease.

**N.B.:** At the AVMC, we do not use or promote methods that may be of questionable animal welfare or 'conservation' impact. 'Orthodox' Traditional Chinese Medicine can include such 'remedies' as tiger penis, bear gall-bladder,

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rhinoceros horn, some threatened plant species etc. The **AVMC** does not use such remedies and cannot support their use.

### **Animal Acupuncture**

There are very early records of the use of acupuncture in animals, but charts are still being devised for the main domestic animal species. This means that many of the 'meridians' and 'acupuncture points', so well-mapped for humans, are a matter of ongoing debate in animals.

**Veterinary acupuncture** may be carefully integrated with [homeopathy](#), provided certain aspects are carefully considered and observed. Christopher Day has lectured and written on the subject of the careful integration of these two therapies, for health benefits.

### **Practical Application**

*"Tess initially seemed worse, then rapidly better over the weekend – now it is difficult to discern any limp at all – we're obviously pleased with progress."* (Tess was a 12½ year-old Border Collie with shoulder lameness of 2 months standing; this report was after 12 days).

*Image: Dalmatian dog acupuncture*

**Acupuncture horses,  
Acupuncture dogs,  
Acupuncture cats**

Acupuncture, properly applied, is a holistic therapy and uses needling (or one of several other methods - see also [LASER](#) (Acupuncture-by-LASER, cold LASER) and [moxibustion](#)) for stimulation of certain 'points' along the meridians. These are called 'acupuncture points'. The points to be treated, in a given patient, may be located far from the perceived focus of trouble. Aquapuncture involves the injection of water, to relieve pain etc. At the **AVMC**, we also inject vitamins into acupuncture points and have applied the injection of homeopathic medicines into acupuncture points (the specific remedies **must** be chosen to integrate with the acupuncture treatment).



The **AVMC** offers canine acupuncture (dog acupuncture), equine acupuncture (horse acupuncture), feline acupuncture (cat acupuncture), although other species are treated, as necessary (e.g. donkeys, goats, rabbits). In individual animals, many chronic and refractory diseases can respond, where conventional medication may have failed. This applies whether acupuncture for [dogs](#), acupuncture for [cats](#), acupuncture for [horses](#), acupuncture for [ponies](#) or for other species.

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These are the conditions which are most often presented for acupuncture treatment, with a reasonable hope for success:

**Acupuncture for horses / Acupuncture for ponies (Equine Acupuncture):** injuries, [back problems](#), [neck problems](#), neck problems, wobbler syndrome, [navicular syndrome](#), lameness, [laminitis](#), arthritis, [kissing spines](#), spavin, and stringhalt. We have found that '[head shaking](#)' (head-shaking or headshaking) cases can respond well and may require 'top-ups' during the season. One of our greatest surprises was the apparent ability to control most cases of '[periodic ophthalmia](#)' (ERU, moon blindness, recurrent ophthalmia, recurrent uveitis, [moonblindness](#)) - the typical response that is now expected with cases of moonblindness is that a current attack can usually be brought under control quite quickly (two or three sessions of horse acupuncture) while successive attacks, treated promptly, become less and less severe, then eventually cease in most cases. Because the horse is a ridden animal, neck pain and back pain are rife in this species. Acupuncture (usually used alongside [chiropractic manipulation](#) and sometimes [LASER](#)) can be greatly beneficial. Equine acupuncture (acupuncture for horses and ponies) is certainly particularly rewarding for practitioner and horse owner alike. Acupuncture charts for horses [equine acupuncture charts] are, as yet, not universally agreed and we work to our own model at the **AVMC**.

**Acupuncture for dogs (Canine Acupuncture):** injuries, arthritis, hip dysplasia, neck problems, back problems, ruptured cruciate ligament (anterior cruciate ligament injury, cruciate ligament damage, cranial cruciate ligament injury), spondylosis, spondylopathy, spondylitis, lumbosacral disease (lumbo-sacral disease), OCD (osteochondritis dissecans), DJD (degenerative joint disease), limping, wobbler syndrome, lameness, shaker syndrome, chorea, dry eye, horner's syndrome, neck pain, back pain, paralysis (including prolapsed disc disease - aka prolapsed intervertebral disc, PID, IVDD, intervertebral disc disease) and other painful conditions. Canine [CDRM](#) has shown great promise, particularly if the dog is over 9 years old at the outset, when the symptoms (signs) start, for which cases reasonable control can often be achieved by canine acupuncture. Cases of [canine epilepsy](#) can sometimes be helped. Dog arthritis is a very common application of dog acupuncture, in which a good response has been seen in most cases, using holistic methodology.

**Acupuncture for cats (Feline Acupuncture):** injuries, arthritis, neck problems, back problems, neck pain, back pain, paralysis, iliac thrombosis, lameness and epilepsy are often presented for cat acupuncture. It is quite surprising how tolerant cats are of acupuncture needling, when they have a reputation for being so fastidious and often resistant to intervention. Cat arthritis is a common presentation for feline acupuncture, in which a good response has been seen in most cases, when acupuncture has been used holistically, alongside dietary and other programmes.

Other more complex diseases may respond to holistically applied Chinese Medicine, where simple 'needling' may fail (see [outcome study](#)).

*Species treated with acupuncture by the AVMC include: horses, ponies, goats, donkeys, cats, dogs, cattle, pigs, sheep, llamas, alpacas, rabbits, ferrets, guinea pigs.*



*Image: French Lop rabbit acupuncture*

*The AVMC accepts referrals in Veterinary Acupuncture, Veterinary Homeopathy, Veterinary Herbal Medicine, back problems in dogs, back problems in horses, back problems in cats, back problems in all species. Chris Day, acupuncture vet, has more than 25 years experience in the field of veterinary acupuncture and is willing to share experiences, understanding and ideas with veterinary colleagues, veterinary students and animal owners.*



*Image: Horse acupuncture*

Pain control by acupuncture is now widely accepted as a valid procedure. Research has demonstrated several known mechanisms. Among these is the release of endogenous 'opioids' (endorphins - distantly related to morphine), which serve to relieve pain and anxiety. This can explain some of the obvious [pain-relieving](#) and relaxation effects. The deeper holistic effects of acupuncture and Chinese Medicine, in the treatment of complex disease, remain an enigma to modern reductionist medical minds, however. The lack of explanation of precise mechanisms does not seem to obstruct the popularity of the therapy, when modern medicine has failed.

Animals accept acupuncture very well, clearly perceiving that it is offered for their benefit. If they object or show marked fear, something is wrong with the technique used for that animal. They should happily present themselves for a repeat treatment, if not upset by the technique. They may show relaxed drowsiness during (and sometimes for one or two days after) treatment or they may become 'activated' or 'energised' soon after. We have found out, from experience, that if

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treatment has failed after three sessions to relieve the symptoms, acupuncture is probably not going to help that animal's problem.

From hard experience, we have found that acupuncture will often fail, if proper [chiropractic](#) work has not been performed alongside it. This phenomenon is not difficult to reason, once discovered, since normal nerve function and energy communication can be seriously disrupted by vertebral and other misalignments and by the resulting muscle spasm and circulatory impairment. In fact, the Ancient Chinese were using spinal manipulation in therapy, possibly from as early as 2700 BC! It is sad that this synergy is not more widely exploited and acupuncture vets would do well to expand their therapy to include this. At the **AVMC**, we integrate these therapies in **every case**, in order to maximise healing benefit.

*Janssen & Prins published a study in 1989, which seemed to highlight acupuncture as the 'treatment of choice' for thoraco-lumbar disc disease (Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association (1989) 25, 169-174).*

*The story of [Garrison Savannah](#) often returns to the forefront.*

*Chris Day has used acupuncture in veterinary practice for 25 years. He is a member of the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS) and the Association of British Veterinary Acupuncturists (ABVA).*

*He has given a half-day session at IVAS Congress (Minneapolis) on the integration of Acupuncture with homeopathy. He updated this with a session at Eugene, Oregon, in 2002.*

### **The Law**

The [Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#) restricts the treatment of animals (other than your own) with acupuncture, by anyone other than a fully qualified vet. Qualified acupuncturists who treat humans are not legally able to treat animals, unless they have a veterinary qualification (MRCVS).

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