

Equine Acupuncture



Acupuncture in equine medicine is a therapeutic approach rooted in Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) and has a long history of use in horses. The practice involves stimulating specific points on the horse's body—known as acupoints—to promote healing and maintain homeostasis. There are several methods used to stimulate these points, including:

- **Dry Needling:** Insertion of fine needles into acupoints.
- **Electroacupuncture (EA):** Passing an electric current through needles inserted into acupoints, with the intensity adjusted to the animal's tolerance.
- **Moxibustion:** Application of heat to acupoints by burning a moxa stick (*Artemisia* species - dried mugwort), often used for chronic arthritis and musculoskeletal disease.
- **Hemoacupuncture:** Bloodletting at specific acupoints, which is typically used for releasing stagnation (pain or heat) in different areas of the body.
- **Aquapuncture:** Injection of solutions (such as vitamin B12 or saline) into acupoints. This can be useful for horses that do not tolerate acupuncture needles well, and can also be used to provide a more prolonged stimulation to certain acupoints.
- **Acupressure/Tui Na:** Application of strong digital pressure or massage tools to acupoints as a non-invasive alternative.
- **Gold Implants:** Surgical implantation of small gold fragments into acupoints, particularly for chronic conditions.

Clinical Applications:

- Acupuncture is widely used for diagnosing and treating lameness and musculoskeletal disorders in horses.
- It can also be used for pain management, neurological issues, digestive problems, and reproductive disorders, as well as for respiratory issues and eye problems.
- Horses are particularly sensitive to palpation of acupoints, making it easier to localize reactive points for diagnosis through an acupoint diagnostic scan.
- Acupuncture can be used as a primary therapy or as a complement to conventional treatments, potentially reducing medication use and side effects.

- Prescription herbal medications are sometimes recommended to use in conjunction with acupuncture to further enhance treatment.

Theoretical Basis:

- TCVM uses complex diagnostic methods, including the theory of Five Elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water) and the concept of internal/external pathogens. The Five Elements theory is analogous to the concept of hormonal and physiological balance in Western medicine.
- Diagnosis in TCVM considers overall clinical signs (including tongue and pulse variations), palpation findings, and changes in acupoints.
- Acupoints are often located at anatomical sites such as muscle junctions, fascia, and near peripheral nerves or ganglia.

Practical Considerations:

- Treatment duration varies from 5 to 30 minutes, depending on the method and clinical scenario.
- Risks are minimal when performed by trained clinicians, though there is small risk of stress or infection with invasive techniques.
- Acupuncture can be used as a primary or adjunctive therapy and is considered simple, cost-effective, and practical, even in field conditions. It can be especially useful where conventional medical treatment is limited.
- General recommendation for acupuncture treatment for many cases is 3 to 5 sessions that are 2 to 4 weeks apart. This is usually more important for chronic cases.
- Chronic conditions may require prolonged or repeated treatment, and monitoring for recurrence is advised. Concurrent conventional therapy may be necessary in some cases.

Scientific Basis:

- Research has shown that acupuncture stimulates the release of endorphins, serotonin, enkephalins, GABA, norepinephrine, and dopamine, providing a biomedical explanation for its effects.
- Techniques such as dry needling can rapidly relieve muscle spasm and pain, sometimes within seconds to minutes.

- Studies suggest that acupuncture, when combined with proper saddle fit, hoof care, and riding techniques, can improve performance in 85–90% of treated horses.

If you are interested in learning more or thinking acupuncture may help your horse, please call our office to set up an appointment!