



FINDLAY RECEIVING A TREATMENT

ACUPUNCTURE *and a few other complementary medical modalities*

written by Jeff Berman

COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE IS

defined as any of a range of medical therapies that fall beyond the scope of scientific medicine but may be used alongside it in the treatment of disease and ill health. This type of medicine includes acupuncture, laser therapy and herbal medicine. Holistic medicine is another complementary modality but will not be discussed here. It is important to notice that the definition of complementary medicine says that it is used "alongside" western medicine. It is the author's belief that having the proverbial "medicine bag" filled with as many treatment modalities as possible will give us the ability to help our animal friends without causing them harm.

Acupuncture is a system of complementary medicine that involves pricking the skin or tissues with needles and is used

to alleviate pain and to treat various physical, mental, and emotional conditions. As you can see, acupuncture can be used to treat the mind and body. In fact, your pet should receive an examination that includes a complete history, a Western medical examination and a Traditional Chinese Medicine Examination. A good history will include the protein and carbohydrate makeup of the food you are feeding, whether your pet likes the heat or the cold, how you obtained your pet, whether your pet gets along with people and other animals, how much your pet drinks and what time of day your pet seems to have a problem. The examination and the history are used to help decide what points to use during treatment.

The treatment itself is pretty straightforward. Sterile acupuncture needles are

inserted in different points around the body to treat the pet. The vast majority of cats, dogs, and horses (as well as other animals) accept the needles readily. Depending on what your pet is being treated for, you may find that anywhere from one to thirty or more needles are used. The needles are left in place for varying lengths of time. Most animals will relax and even fall asleep with treatment. There should be an immediate effect from the treatment. However, multiple treatments usually needed to help treat the problem at hand. Sometimes, attaching electrodes to the acupuncture needles is used to help treat animals. Most commonly, this is used with animals that have a neurologic deficit of some sort. The level of intensity used is adjusted to each individual animal so as to get an effect but not to cause pain for the pet.

But does acupuncture work? Yes. If so, how does it work? This is where acupuncture meets with some controversy. Proving the efficacy of this treatment modality can be difficult. There are studies that have proved outcomes but have yet to fully explain how things work. But the science is coming. Acupuncture is gaining greater footing in both human and animal medicine. We also are doing no harm.

It is important to find an acupuncturist that has been certified. There are a few programs in the United States that certify veterinarians in acupuncture. Here are a few links to help find a practitioner in your area:

- The Chi Institute** - tcvm.com
- The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society** - ivas.org
- The American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture** - aava.org

In addition to acupuncture, many practitioners will use herbal medications. The use of herbals to work in conjunction with the acupuncture is of great benefit



and requires the full assessment of your pet as described above. It is important to understand that, like western medications, herbals can have side effects. Therefore, it is very important to speak with someone who is trained in the use of this type of complementary medicine.

Lastly, the use of laser therapy is a very exciting modality of treatment. The wavelengths of light contained within the field of treatment are absorbed by the tissues. This has an effect at the cellular level causing some of the following results – increased blood circulation, quicker healing times, regeneration of damaged tissues, decreased pain. The effects are cumulative and animals will usually need to have more than 4-6 treatments to get

the full benefits of the laser therapy. After the initial treatment, the laser can be continued if needed.

More recently, the use of laser therapy for patients that have just undergone surgery is becoming the standard of care. The laser is used to help incisions heal quicker and decrease pain postoperatively. An example of this is to use the laser to treat an animal's mouth after a dental cleaning and ensuing extractions.

Complementary medicine is a great way to expand the veterinarian's "medicine bag". Finding a trained practitioner is important to make sure the right thing is being done for your pet. The use of acupuncture, herbal medicines and laser therapy are great ways to help your pet.

Jeff Berman became certified in veterinary acupuncture through the Chi Institute. He was born and raised in Philadelphia and wanted to be a veterinarian since as far back as he can remember. Besides improving his acupuncture skills, he likes to rescue dogs, play soccer, read and spend time with his family (human and animal). ftwashingtonvet.com

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