

## **Acupuncture-What clients should know before their first appointment.**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

We're proud to be one of the only veterinary practices in Western New York to offer this safe and effective treatment method. This flyer is intended to give answers to some of the more common questions about acupuncture for animals.

#### **What is acupuncture?**

Acupuncture is the stimulation of specific points on the body via the insertion and manipulation of very fine, sterile, taper point needles in the superficial tissues of the body. Each treatment is tailored to your animal's unique situation based on a thorough medical history review, careful physical examination and assessment of the body's neurological and musculoskeletal systems. Our practice builds on the tradition of the ancient Chinese Acupuncturists by incorporating the cutting edge of today's neuroscience to yield a system of treatment that is as powerful as it is complementary to other therapeutic techniques.

#### **How does it work?**

Scientifically speaking, acupuncture enhances blood and lymph flow at the local level, relieves myofascial trigger points, modulates traffic in the spinal cord and peripheral nerves, causes release of anti-pain and anti-inflammatory molecules from the brain stem and local tissues, and improves balance between the sympathetic (stress response) and parasympathetic (rest response) nervous systems.

Acupuncture is one of several methods of neuromodulation - a process where the body is encouraged to "tune up" or "calm down" various elements of the nervous system, thereby influencing the natural balance between "stressors" and "relaxers" that are supposed to exist within in the body. Imbalance creates disease.

#### **Real Life Effects:**

- Improved function on nerves
- Relaxation of muscle & fascia
  - Control of pain and inflammation
- Improved mood and quality of life
- Better circulation and healing

#### **What kinds of things can you treat?**

Although nearly any medical problem can benefit from acupuncture treatment, here are some common conditions that are frequently benefited by acupuncture:

- Arthritis (including hip dysplasia & cruciate ligament disease)
- Allergies (itchy dogs, ear infections, impacted anal glands, foot/leg licking)
- Behavioral problems (general anxiety, separation anxiety, storm phobias, obsessive/compulsive disorders, etc)

Voiding dysfunction (constipation, incontinence, diarrhea, night time leaking)

Post-operative/trauma recovery (as part of rehab/physical therapy)

Chronic pain (from injury, surgery, or other disease process)

### **Does acupuncture hurt?**

We strive to maintain a relaxed and enjoy-able environment for our patients and clients. We never force treatment on anyone. Because of this, most patients find their treatment enjoyable, or at least tolerable. Some pets even fall asleep during treatment. Except in extreme cases, we do not sedate our patients and encourage clients to stay with their pets during treatments.

### **Are there any side effects?**

Acupuncture has been used for thousands of years as a safe and gentle treatment for many diverse health problems. In the hands of a qualified and appropriately trained medical professional, acupuncture is incredibly safe. On occasion, some patient's symptoms may seem a little worse the day after treatment. Usually within a day or two this effect passes.

### **What is a typical treatment like?**

First timers:

On your first visit, Dr. Aimi will book an entire hour to spend with you and your pet. Although it takes longer and is more expensive, this visit is important, because every case is different and we want to take the time to thoroughly understand your animal's unique situation. Next, Dr. Aimi will perform a complete physical examination, including a careful evaluation of your pet's musculo-skeletal and nervous systems. One of medical acupuncture's main tenants is that appropriate treatment can only stem from appropriate diagnosis- thus if Dr. Aimi's examination brings up any questions, he may recommend further work up prior to setting up a full treatment program.

Dr. Aimi is trained in osteopathic myofascial palpation and muscle trigger point diagnosis. This specialized skill allows him to "read" the soft tissues (muscles and fascia) to generate a "map" of sorts that identifies fascial restrictions and painful spots, directs attention to specific joints or body parts, and guides the selection of points for acupuncture treatment or manipulation. These techniques are performed at the same time as the physical examination, and most pets find it very relaxing. Finally, Dr. Aimi will design a treatment specific to your pet's needs, and will proceed with needling. We tend to go pretty slow on the first treatment, since it's very important to us that our patients do not find acupuncture stressful. In many cases one of the primary goals of treatment is to calm the sympathetic (fight or flight) nervous system response, and the last thing we want is for animals to associate treatment with fear or pain. First treatments often only involve needling 3 or 4 points, though this is highly variable, and the success of a treatment is not dependent on the number of needles used. The needles are gently inserted to a depth of a centimeter or so, and then are frequently manipulated so as to engage the collagen fibers in the fascial matrix. The needles often stay in place for 10-15 minutes, depending on the condition being treated and the characteristics of the needling site. Once the fascia has relaxed, and the tissues have responded, the needles frequently fall out on their own or Dr. Aimi will remove them. Dr. Aimi will continue to assess the response of the tissues during the treatment and will incorporate other manipulative techniques during the course of the session. In many cases diagnosis is also treatment. The appointment will end with Dr. Aimi discussing what to watch for, and

recommendations for home care and follow-up visits.

### **Follow up appointments:**

During subsequent appointments, various parts of the initial visit will be repeated, but normally followup treatments are scheduled to allow for a half hour of time with Dr. Aimi. Extended appointments to allow for more consultation or assessment of new problems are available, just make sure to mention this when you schedule.

### **How many times do animals typically need to be treated?**

Normally two or three treatments lasting 20-30 minutes are given within the first two weeks, then the frequency is tapered to what is appropriate for each case. Depending on the type of illness, severity of symptoms, and overall health of the animal, this may be once per week, once per month or two, or simply as needed.

### **What should I bring to an acupuncture appointment?**

An open mind. Friends curious about acupuncture that are willing to quietly observe (and don't stress your animal). A portable kennel for your feline friend, with a removable top if possible. A list with any questions or concerns, including notes about changes since the last visit. Treats that your pet loves to eat (especially if your pet has specific dietary needs- we do provide treats as well as part of your pet's treatment). Your pet's favorite bed/blanket/pillow. Comfortable clothing that allows you to sit on the floor with your animal if you wish.

### **How should I prepare my animal for acupuncture?**

Take your dog for a relaxing stroll before your appointment, make sure that opportunity is give for "nature to call". Try not to schedule any stressful or exciting appointments (grooming, play dates, routine vet visits, etc) back to back with acupuncture. Remember, we're frequently trying to get the "fight or flight" response calmed down!

For all patients, but especially cats, try to change as little of your daily routine on acupuncture days as possible- animals are incredibly capable of picking up on our non-verbal cues! Give any prescription medications or supplements as usual.

### **Does acupuncture always help?**

Like any treatment, we expect a few cases to appear miraculous and a few to not respond at all. In our experience, the majority (about 80%) will get at least some benefit. Acupuncture does not replace regular veterinary medicine and other treatments. Each animal is unique and different. We do think acupuncture represents a valuable addition for many problems and can frequently reduce dependency on more invasive or side effect prone treatments.