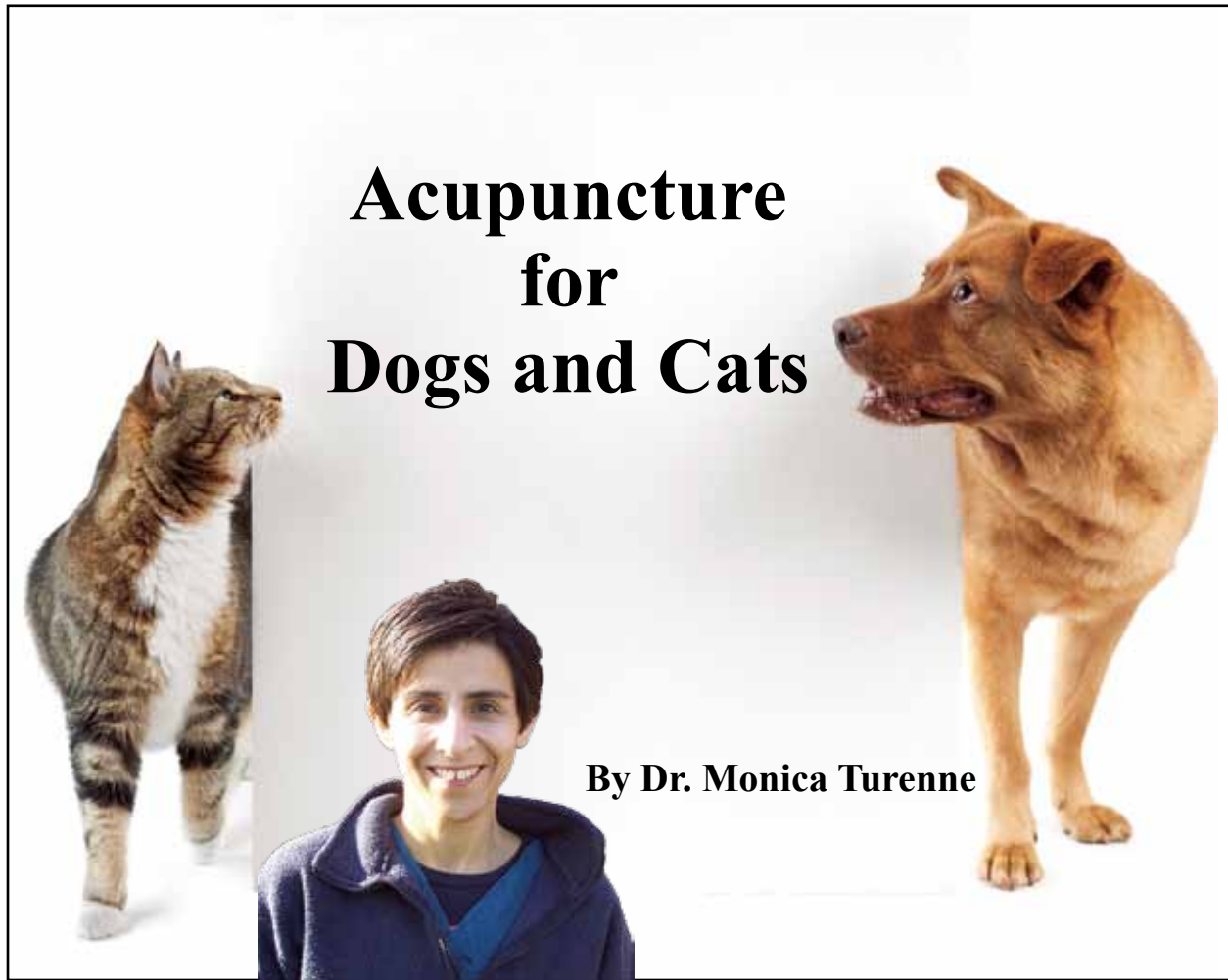


ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

Acupuncture for Dogs and Cats

By Dr. Monica Turenne



(This is our first in an ongoing series on animals. Each issue we will have a guest columnist. We asked Dr. Monica Turenne of the Washtenaw Veterinary Hospital to write this first one. She is a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, and a Certified Veterinary Acupuncturist.)

Acupuncture is a treatment modality that has become more mainstream in the past few decades. As part of the care I provide for dogs and cats, I have found veterinary acupuncture to be incredibly rewarding. To help you understand more about this therapy, I have compiled several questions and answers, and shared details about several cases.

How long has acupuncture been used in veterinary medicine?

For about 3,000 years. The first “needles” were actually made of stone and evidence shows their use in humans dating back 8,000 years!

Why is veterinary acupuncture gaining popularity?

Because of its efficacy and minimal side effects. This is also true for herbal medicine. And I also think that pet owners want their pets to live as they live – organically, free of preservatives and toxins. We see this in how owners feed their pets, and in veterinary medicine, we are seeing this in how owners want to treat illnesses in their pets.

What diseases can veterinary acupuncture treat?

Almost any disease, including but not limited to arthritis, muscle soreness, disc problems, skin allergies, epilepsy, anxiety, asthma, kidney failure, cancer support, diarrhea, vomiting and more.

How does acupuncture work?

There are two ways of looking at acupuncture. One approach emphasizes the body’s physiologic response to the needles. With this approach, evidence shows

that as needles are inserted into the skin, blood flow increases to that area which speeds healing. Placement of needles also decreases muscle spasms and causes endorphin release which alleviates pain and makes the animal feel good, respectively.

The second way of looking at acupuncture is the Chinese/Eastern medicine approach, which views disease as an imbalance in the body. In Chinese medicine, the belief is that energy flows along channels or meridians in the body so if there is imbalance, there is disruption of energy flow which leads to illness and pain. With detailed history taking, and Chinese examination, which involves looking at the tongue color and feeling the pulses, we are able to make a Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) diagnosis. Once the imbalance and diagnosis are known, our goal is to re-establish balance, energy and harmony in the body, thereby restoring health and allowing the body to heal. We can accomplish this by knowing what acupuncture points to select and which herbal medicines would be most appropriate.

How does Chinese medicine differ from Western medicine?

If we had three patients who are the same age, sex and breed and who all had the same medical condition, they would be treated in the same way in Western medicine. In Chinese medicine, each one of these patients may have a different imbalance and may be treated very differently depending on their TCVM diagnosis. For example, one patient may have a deficiency in heat but another may have a deficiency in coolness. Nevertheless, once the underlying imbalance has been corrected, acupuncture and

herbal medicine are used to keep the patient balanced. In doing so, Chinese medicine focuses more on prevention.

Can you combine veterinary acupuncture and Western medicine?

Absolutely. Some patients are on medications such as steroids or non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. Some owners are interested in weaning their pets off medications and others want additional pain control. I work with owners to achieve their goals for their pet. In many cases, acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine can replace Western medicines. And in some cases, patients may have liver or kidney disorders that prevent them from being able to use Western medications.

“I had a mix breed dog coming to see me for an injury to the knee. The owner would bring a giant bulk size jar of peanut butter. During the whole acupuncture session, the dog would have his entire nose inside the peanut butter jar eating the peanut butter!”

One patient of ours is an 8 year old Brittany Spaniel. She had an injury and arthritis and was potentially going to need medications in order to continue her hunting career. We started acupuncture and she responded very well. Even her owner (an initial skeptic) is now a believer! We were able to avoid non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. She is on herbal medications and is hunting with the best of them!

I also treat a Labrador Retriever for neck pain. His pain is alleviated with not just acupuncture alone but with a combination of acupuncture and muscle relaxants. This is what works for him and the owners are very pleased with the results.

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“Some owners are interested in weaning their pets off medications and others want additional pain control. I work with owners to achieve their goals for their pet.”

How many appointments are necessary to see results?

This depends on the case, but usually weekly sessions for 4-6 weeks are necessary to see results. If there is no improvement by 6 weeks, the patient may be a non-responder. While this can happen, most patients show some type of response. We then increase the time between appointments, with the goal of eventually having one appointment every 4-6 months.

How do the dogs and cats handle needles?

Dogs typically tolerate the acupuncture needles well, and often relax and even fall asleep during the appointment. With cats, the response varies, depending on their personality.

One case I had was a male Beagle who had to be muzzled for acupuncture. The owner knew he would not tolerate the needles and that he would attempt to bite if not muzzled and she was right. But muzzled, we were able to complete his sessions. As we treated him, he slowly improved. He started to become more mellow at home and less aggressive, and eventually, after a few months of acupuncture and herbal therapy, we were actually able to do the sessions *without a muzzle* and could even pet him.

Another case I had was a cat who was having problems with constipation. She was not normally a very nice cat but she presented very ill so she was allowing us to do anything. The owners were interested in alternative therapies so after we performed the necessary treatments to relieve her constipation we started acupuncture and herbal therapy. She tolerated the needles very well and began to improve at home. Her appetite got better and she was using the litter box more normally. After 2 treatments, she made it very clear that *she was no longer interested in acupuncture!* So we no longer attempted acupuncture, but continued herbal therapy, which kept her regular and the owners were happy.

And I have to share the funniest case I have had. I had a mix breed dog coming to see me for an injury to the knee. The owner would bring a giant bulk size jar of peanut butter. During the whole acupuncture session, the dog would have his entire nose inside the peanut butter jar eating the peanut butter!

There are some patients who will not tolerate needles. It is ironic that my own dog is an example of one of them! He was simply too sensitive and there are dogs and many cats that are like this. In these cases we can use herbal therapy and food therapy to treat the patient.

What are some cases you have treated with veterinary acupuncture?

I treated a Chihuahua who became paralyzed on all 4 limbs due to a disc problem. The owner was tapering medications because of lack of response and side effects. We did every other day acupuncture and slowly, he regained the use of his legs and returned to normal function!

I have been treating a Brittany Spaniel who had a benign but invasive mass removed from his face at a specialty clinic...twice. After the second surgery, the owners started alternative treatment to prevent recurrence. After the first surgery, it came back after one year. We have been doing food therapy, Chinese herbs and regular acupuncture. It has now been more than a year and no sign of recurrence. He is doing great!!

A six year old Pug was prone to allergies in the summer months. Unfortunately, we were unable to extend his time between acupuncture visits by more than one week, so for the summer, he came to see me weekly. But we were able to avoid steroids.

I am currently treating a young Golden Retriever who has multiple orthopedic issues that cannot be dealt with surgically. The owner has chosen not to put him on medication but instead comes in once monthly for acupuncture. She sees acupuncture as his “medicine”. He has done very well and is very comfortable!

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(Dr. Monica Turenne can be reached at the Washtenaw Veterinary Hospital, 2729 Packard Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48108; their phone number is 734-971-5800 and their website is: www.washtenawveterinaryhospital.com)



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