

Two Alternative Therapies That Work Wonders for Pain

Pain relief is one of the most common reasons owners seek out this alternative therapy. Yet that's not all it can do - it promotes muscle growth and tissue healing, can help asthma and dermatitis and reduce seizures in dogs. The other helps reduce the risk of injury and joint degeneration.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Acupuncture for pets can be very beneficial, leading to the release of hormones, an increase in blood circulation, nerve stimulation, relief from muscle spasms, and more
- Chiropractic care can be used in pets in cases of injury or disease, such as hip dysplasia, as well as for regular maintenance
- The success of your pet's adjunctive therapy depends on the skill of the practitioner, which is why it's important to find someone who is experienced and licensed to treat pets

Many pet parents today are seeking alternative methods of **pain relief** and disease treatment and management for furry family members, and acupuncture and chiropractic care top the list of non-conventional therapies.

Acupuncture, while a relatively new modality among conventional veterinarians in the U.S., has been used for thousands of years in China to treat a variety of ailments in animals and humans.¹

This ancient technique involves stimulating your pet's nervous system via specific acupuncture points on the body. The Eastern explanation is that acupuncture reroutes the body's vital energy force, or Qi, which flows along nerve pathways called meridians. The Western summary is that metal needles (good electrical conductors) modulate the nervous system's electricity, which reroutes and normalizes synapses and can affect all organ systems.

Fine needles, therapeutic lasers, or pressure may be used for stimulation, and varying durations of stimulation are used to yield specific changes in the central nervous system. Research has shown that acupuncture can lead to the release of hormones, increase blood circulation, stimulate nerves, relieve muscle spasms and more, and there's increasing interest in its ability to help relieve pain and other conditions in pets.

Benefits of Acupuncture for Pets

Pain relief is one of the most common reasons people seek acupuncture for their pets. The research on this is sound and growing. For example, a study published in Topics in Companion Animal Medicine found "acupuncture offers a compelling and safe method for pain management in ... veterinary patients and should be strongly considered as a part of multimodal pain management plans."²

Even in cases of lameness, a combined approach of acupuncture and manual therapy was found to improve comfort and mobility in dogs suffering from musculoskeletal pain, with improvements observed in play behavior, walking, jumping, trotting, descending stairs, stiffness after rest and rising from a lying position.³

Acupuncture has been found to alter gait in horses,⁴ and was recommended in one study as a great contributor to equine rehabilitation by promoting pain relief, tissue healing and muscle growth.⁵ The researchers stated, "Acupuncture is safe, has minimal detrimental side effects, and is well tolerated by most horses."

Beyond pain relief, acupuncture has been found to effectively reduce the incidence of seizures in dogs. Many holistic and integrative veterinarians use acupuncture routinely to treat patients with seizure disorders. It's a very versatile technique that can be used not only on dogs and horses but also exotic, zoo, and farm animals. I've personally performed acupuncture on birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

Further, according to the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS), acupuncture may be useful for functional problems involving paralysis, inflammation, and pain, including:⁶

- Musculoskeletal problems, such as arthritis, intervertebral disk disease or traumatic nerve injury
- Respiratory problems, such as feline asthma
- Skin problems such as lick granulomas and allergic dermatitis
- Gastrointestinal problems such as **diarrhea**
- Selected reproductive problems

Benefits of Chiropractic for Pets

Chiropractic treatments focus on correcting subluxations (improper alignment between two bones) to allow the nervous system to function optimally.⁷ It uses the body's own healing abilities and the relationship between the spine and the nervous system to restore and maintain good health. Adjustments may be made by hand or using instruments.

Chiropractic care can be used in cases of injury or disease, such as hip dysplasia or collar injuries, as well as for regular body maintenance. The latter may be especially useful with large and giant-breed dogs, or dogs who participate in athletic sports, in order to prevent musculoskeletal system degeneration.

In fact, I recommend maintenance chiropractic care proactively for all my patients to reduce the risk of injury and joint degeneration. It even benefits puppies and kittens because they are "loose" — their joints are not yet completely formed and they're prone to subluxations.

Dogs with patellar luxation (floating kneecaps) may also benefit, as can those with urinary incontinence. I've seen many cases of improved bladder tone and neurologic function through maintenance chiropractic care. As with acupuncture, chiropractic can help treat and prevent a wide range of conditions, including internal medical issues, such as chronic constipation, along with the following:

- Neck and back pain
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing

- Tail injuries
- Sporting or working dog injuries
- Muscle spasms and nerve problems
- Bowel, bladder, and other internal organ disorders
- Injuries from slips, falls, accidents
- Maintenance of joint and spine health
- Jaw or TMJ problems
- Post-surgical healing

Finding a Skilled Practitioner

The success of your pet's alternative therapy depends on the skill of the practitioner, which is why it's important to find someone who is experienced and licensed to treat pets.

You can search for a certified animal chiropractor in your area at the **American Veterinary Chiropractor Association** and/or the **College of Animal Chiropractic**. To find a list of veterinarians trained as acupuncturists, visit the College of Integrative Veterinary **Therapies' directory**.

Sources and References

^{1,6} [International Veterinary Acupuncture Society, What is Veterinary Acupuncture?](#)

² [Fry, L.M. et al. Top Companion Anim Med. 2014 Jun;29\(2\):35-42](#)

³ [Lane, D.M. and Hill, S. A. Can Vet J. 2016 Apr;57\(4\):407-14](#)

⁴ [Dunkel, B. et al. Vet Anaesth Analg. 2017 Jan;44\(1\):154-162](#)

⁵ [Klide, A.M. et al. Acupunct Electrother Res. 1987;12\(1\):71-4](#)

⁷ [American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association, Complementary Medicine Modalities](#)
