

Can acupuncture help a horse?

Acupuncture is the use of special needles and other techniques to stimulate acupoints.

Acupoints are pinpoint areas on the body where the skin actually is a little thinner and has a lower electrical (galvanic) resistance but an increase of blood supply, nerve endings, and mast cells (a type of immune cell in the tissues).

When stimulated, acupoints exert specific physiological effects. Most acupoints are associated with meridians, which create a network connecting all parts of the body like conduits of communication and transportation, from front to back, top to bottom, and inside to outside.

Each paired meridian is associated with an internal organ system. Because the meridians are paired, it is not necessary to use acupoints on both sides to achieve the desired effect. When needling a point on a meridian, it is possible to benefit the whole meridian—that is how you can benefit the eye by using a point on the hind leg.

A thorough physical exam and history is necessary to diagnose a disease pattern and to determine which acupoints to use in treatment. There are different ways to stimulate acupoints, depending on what is being treated.

- Dry-needling is the use of acupuncture needles and hand manipulation;
- Electrostimulation is applying low electrical currents to needles to strengthen the stimulation;
- Warm needling, in which a Chinese herb called mugwort is burned on the needle to open the meridian;
- Aquapuncture, which is injecting a fluid into the acupuncture point to lengthen and strengthen the

stimulation of the acupoint;

- Laser, in which a low-power laser can be used to make shallow penetration into the tissue
- Hemoacupuncture, which is the use of a hypodermic needle to puncture an acupoint and cause it to bleed;
- Pneumoacupuncture, which is the use of a hypodermic needle to inject air into an acupoint; and
- Implants. The use of surgical implants can provide a longer lasting stimulation.

Acupuncture can greatly benefit many commonly occurring conditions in the horse. It can be used to relieve or relax muscle spasms and myofascial trigger points, increase the blood supply to an area, improve the immune system, stimulate nerves and strengthen muscles, and benefit reproduction.

It also can improve the throat score and laryngeal hemiplegia, relieve back or other muscle soreness, help testicles descend in ridglings, improve contracted tendons in foals, stimulate appetite, calm an overly nervous or anxious horse, and relieve colic and diarrhea.

The positive effects produced can be due to the triggering of nerves, the release of hormones, or the stimulation of the immune system.



Matilda Lee, D.V.M.
Hagyard Equine Medical Institute

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