

Pet Acupuncture Practice Moves Mainstream

Some dog owners are turning to Eastern medicine to treat their pets' common ailments like arthritis and anxiety.



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By [Vicki Chen](#)

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When a pet gets sick, families often do the most they can to keep their furry family members around for a long as possible. But what if the key to your animal's longevity could be found in a tiny needle instead of a big prescription?

Many pet owners are now turning to acupuncture and holistic veterinary care to treat the most common illnesses, such as pain, anxiety and even accident-related paralysis. In fact, Eastern medicine is the latest game changer in veterinary care.

Dog owner Branwen Steinhauser is a strong advocate of the approach. Her seven-year-old Chesapeake Bay retriever, Lucy, started having problems getting up and walking on her own two years ago.

"We had her x-rayed. We've had her looked at many times," Steinhauser said.

She was determined to avoid the long and expensive road of surgery and traditional pain medication for her beloved dog.

"I just kept thinking there must be something else!" she explained. "I mean, I go to therapy for my neck, I go to acupuncture and all that. There's gotta be something for dogs!"

Then, she heard about California Animal Rehabilitation (CARE) in Santa Monica. The vets here combine acupuncture and herbal medicine with high tech physical therapy techniques such as hydrotherapy and laser treatments.

Veterinarian Heather Oxford is one of the four animal doctors certified to practice these techniques on pets. She said Eastern medicine is becoming more mainstream among pet owners and in veterinary school curricula.

"Eastern medicine has been around for thousands of years and Western medicine has only been around for a couple hundred," Oxford said. "Eastern is the one we should feel most comfortable with because it's more tried and true."

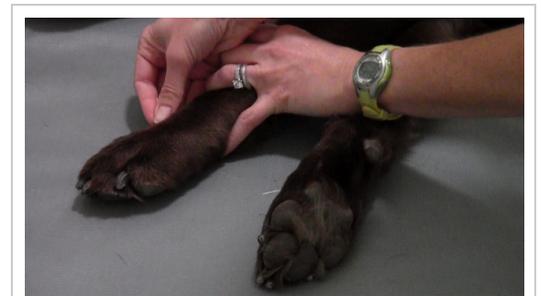
One of her patients, a chocolate lab named Moose, suffers from severe arthritis and neck pain that makes it difficult for him to walk.

"Moose is an excellent acupuncture patient," Oxford said.

Some animals can be anxious, but Moose is so cooperative that he often falls right to sleep.

During the procedure, the vet inserts small needles into the skin. Acupuncture is based on the ancient Chinese concept of chi - a flow of energy throughout the body. The animals experience a euphoric state of mind and body, because the needles stimulate sensory receptors, which spark the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkiller.

"As time goes on, we start to see the pet retain the benefits of the acupuncture session," Oxford said. "We can a lot of the times decrease the frequency, but



Acupuncture is an ancient Eastern medical technique (ATVN).



still see the same benefits in the pet.”

For some pets, the vet will connect electro-units, which prolong the effectiveness of the treatment.

“[The dog is] not feeling like he’s getting zapped or anything,” Oxford said. “It’s just a very low setting.”

Each treatment takes about one hour. On a busy day, the vets here can treat up to 40 patients and the holistic veterinary care movement is growing.

The American Academy for Veterinary Acupuncture has more than 800 members this year, compared to just 200 a decade ago. The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society has trained more than 6,000 vets worldwide since 1974.

Moose has been a patient at CARE for four years (ATVN).

But the procedures can be very expensive. Most pets at CARE enrolls in an 8-week custom program. The frequency of visits per week depends on each pet’s individual needs.

A two-month program with an average of two visits per week can range from \$2,000 to \$3,000. The hefty price tag means owners must weigh the costs versus benefits of the treatment.

Lucy’s owner said it’s worth it and encourages all pet owners to try acupuncture and therapy for their animals.

“When you’ve had a dog that’s in a lot of pain, and you can tell they’re not happy and you really love your dog, you’ll be willing to open your mind and try something,” Steinhauser said. “She seems happier. She just looks at me with a happier look.”

And since a happy dog makes for a happy human, Lucy’s owner said she plans to stick with the program.



Steinhauser says when Lucy feels better, she feels better too (ATVN).