



# Acupuncture

**Acupuncture** is one of the therapies offered in the use of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) and is defined as the stimulation of a specific point on the body (an acupuncture point) to cause a therapeutic effect. TCVM has been practiced for over 3,000 years in China and all over the world.

## The Benefits of Acupuncture

Today, acupuncture is used by itself or in conjunction with Western medicine to treat many different problems, especially pain, and promote overall good health and well-being in people and animals. Acupuncture is used in horses for many musculoskeletal injuries. It is very useful for sore muscles, back pain, acute and chronic injuries, subtle gait abnormalities and complex lameness cases. It can be used to keep our horses in training and in top performance at shows (the FEI has ruled that acupuncture can be used on competition horses without breaking FEI rules.). Acupuncture is also beneficial for internal illnesses such as digestive disorders, eye problems, skin diseases, laminitis, and others.

In combination with Western medicine, acupuncture has given us an additional tool to maximize the health of our equine companion so we can keep riding and showing a healthy, pain-free animal. **There are no negative side effects to acupuncture therapy.** The wonderful feature of acupuncture is that it can be used preventatively to treat an imbalance or area of stagnation (low grade soreness) before it becomes a problem (i.e., clinical lameness) or causes your horse to be resistant to training.



## How does Acupuncture Work?

Inserting fine acupuncture needles stimulates tiny nerve endings that carry impulses to the spinal cord and brain. This results in responses within the nervous and endocrine systems, leading to the release of neurotransmitters and hormones. These influence the function of the body tissues and organ systems.

In addition to the placement of the needle (called dry needle technique), the points may be stimulated in a variety of ways depending on the condition being treated. These techniques include dry needling, aqua-acupuncture, moxibustion, pneumoacupuncture, hemoacupuncture, and electro-acupuncture stimulation. Whatever the technique used, the goal is to restore the free flow of *Qi* (energy), balance, and function. Once the body is “balanced” it is more resistant to disease, fatigue, and stress-induced damage.

Acupuncture increases the release of natural painkillers such as endorphins, enkephalins and serotonin, which act on the pain pathways in the brain and spinal cord and can block the transmission of incoming pain signals.

The effect of a single needle is determined by where it is placed in the body and which nerves are stimulated, hence the need for a thorough knowledge of veterinary anatomy and physiology.