

ACUPUNCTURE AND COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE IN THE RACEHORSE

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THE USE OF COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE CONTINUES TO INCREASE IN USE IN VETERINARY PRACTICE.

As seen in human sports medicine, acupuncture and other complementary therapies have become increasingly recognised and effective adjuvants for improved performance and prevention of injury.

In the equine athlete, acupuncture has become recognised as an effective and valuable tool to prevent, treat and manage musculoskeletal conditions. Since acupuncture is a safe therapy with minimal detrimental side effects, and mostly well tolerated in the horse, this therapy can complement conventional veterinary medicine while still complying with prohibited substance policies.

Acupuncture is not a replacement to conventional veterinary medicine but can be used as an adjunct.

HOW DOES ACUPUNCTURE WORK?

Acupoints are focal areas where needles are inserted through the skin to exert a physiologic effect. They can correlate to motor points (where the nerve enters the muscle), superficial nerves, or at muscle-tendon junctions. Of the classical acupuncture points, 70 per cent are closely associated with muscles and can act as

trigger points.

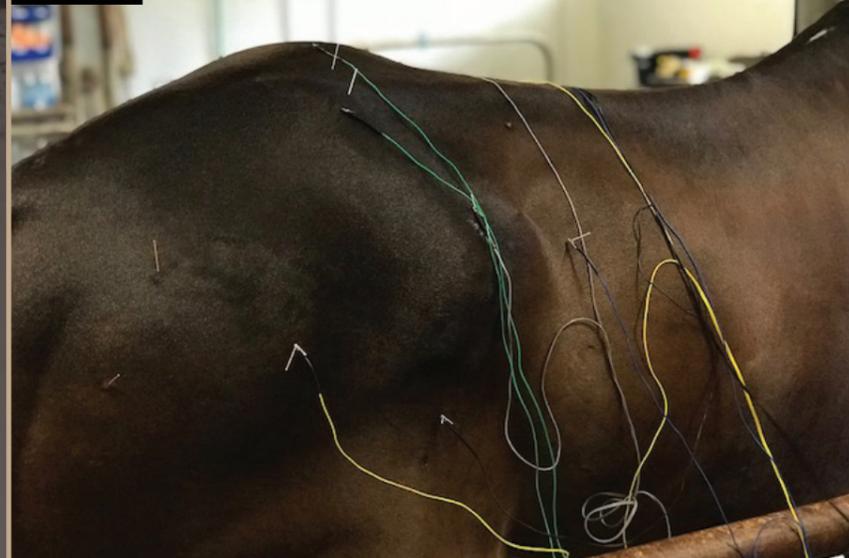
Acupoints have also been shown to be closely related to fascia. The fascia can grab the needle and works to stimulate the acupuncture response known as “de qi” or tissue grasp sensation. Some studies have shown that acupuncture can stimulate release of stored stem cells from the muscles that can facilitate healing.

RESULTS FROM THAT STUDY INDICATED ACUPUNCTURE COULD DETECT 80 PER CENT OF LAMENESS ISSUES IN A HORSE, COMPARED TO A COMPLETE PHYSICAL EXAMINATION.

PICTURE 1



PICTURE 2



Acupuncture stimulates sensory nerves, aiding to transmit signals through the nervous system to the brain. Transmitters and hormones are then released from the brain, resulting in positive effects throughout the body.

WHEN TO USE ACUPUNCTURE?

Acupuncture can be used to alongside traditional diagnostics to evaluate lameness problems. A recent prospective study in the US was conducted to answer the question of whether palpation or acupuncture scanning was more effective to diagnose lameness in performance horses. Results from that study indicated acupuncture could detect 80 per

cent of lameness issues in a horse, compared to a complete physical examination. The use of acupuncture during lameness examinations and treatments can in turn be an effective diagnostic, as well as offering an alternative perspective for treatment.

The goals of veterinary physical rehabilitation are to reduce pain, facilitate healing, and restore strength and endurance while bringing the horse back to a prior level of activity and preventing re-injury. Acupuncture is a great tool to employ both while the horse is actively working to prevent problems and during the rehabilitation period to assist in recovery.

ADDITIONAL TREATMENTS

Although acupuncture is an effective adjuvant for musculoskeletal problems, it also can be used for other issues such as anhidrosis (non sweaters), head shaking, tying up, behavioural problems, gastrointestinal disturbance, and metabolic disease. Reproductive diseases such as infertility and cycling problems have seen benefit in human and veterinary medicine alongside conventional veterinary medicine diagnostics. Certain respiratory and neurologic diseases can also benefit from acupuncture.

Acupuncture is an effective adjuvant for the racehorse in injury prevention, rehabilitation, and maintenance of performance. Most horses tolerate acupuncture and relax after the first few needles but some may take a couple sessions to completely relax.

A well trained veterinary acupuncturist or trained clinician may use a combination of dry needling, Vitamin B12 injections, moxa, and electroacupuncture to facilitate therapy. Horses are individuals as to how they respond to acupuncture, with the most commonly seen effect is relaxation (yawning, licking/chewing) observed during therapy.

In summary, acupuncture can be used to treat the entire athlete as a complement to traditional performance medicine. It should not be used as a replacement, but can be an effective adjuvant to get the best performance out of the racehorse. ■