Acupuncture & Traditional Chinese Medicine

INDICATIONS FOR ANCIENT MEDICAL TECHNIQUES

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The Chinese have been practicing acupuncture on both humans and animals for thousands of years. Other aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) include herbal medications and utilizing different foods to help alleviate disease. This article will focus on what TCM is, what these techniques entail, and indications for these ancient medical techniques. All of these techniques have a common goal: to restore balance and normal energy flow. In TCM, when the body is unbalanced or energy is not flowing properly, disease results.

TCM has a different method of classifying disease and diagnosing patients when compared to "Western" medicine. A TCM practitioner will do a typical physical examination, but will also do things like assess your pet's temperature, tongue color and pulse quality to help the TCM practitioner determine a specific TCM diagnosis pattern. There are different TCM diagnoses for similar presentations of clinical signs, so obtaining a specific TCM diagnosis is extremely important.

TCM is indicated for a variety of health conditions including osteoarthritis, muscular weakness or paralysis, back pain, allergies, anxiety, and gastrointestinal disorders. There are multiple reasons clients request TCM therapies: some choose to use TCM therapies alone or in conjunction with Western medicine, some choose TCM because their pet has failed treatment or had adverse reactions with Western medications, and some request TCM therapies because it has worked for their own health problems.

Acupuncture is the stimulation of specific points on the body (acupoints) for therapeutic purposes. The most common way to stimulate acupoints is with needles, which is called the dry needle technique, but there are other ways as well. Acupoints can be stimulated with injections ("aquapuncture"), with heat ("moxibustion"), with lasers, and with electro-stimulation. All of these techniques are used to help restore balance.

Herbal medication is used to augment the effects of acupuncture, or in place of acupuncture. Candidates for herbal medications include pets that cannot tolerate needle placement or pets that are receiving acupuncture but require additional management. Herbal medications are good for patients who have failed medical management with Western therapies, or in conjunction with Western medications. A potential risk of herbal medications, however, is interaction with Western medications as well as quality control. It is important to let your TCM practitioner know about all of your pet's medications and health problems. Herbs are frequently available in powder or capsule form. Specific herbal medication choices are made based on the pet's TCM diagnosis.

TCM food therapy involves treating specific TCM diagnoses with foods that will help alleviate the clinical signs associated with the diagnosis. The best example of TCM food therapy is hot and cold foods. In TCM, temperature preferences and relative body temperature is very important when determining a diagnosis. Some animals feel warm and prefer cool surfaces, while others feel cool and prefer warm environments. TCM food therapy involves treating "warm" animals with cooling foods and "cool" animals with warming foods. Examples of cooling foods include whitefish and turkey, while examples of warming foods include chicken and lamb. There are also neutral foods for animals that do not have temperature preferences or tendencies. The exact mechanism of cooling versus warming has not been fully determined.

Acupuncture treatment of a dog for hindlimb weakness and incontinence.

TCM is used for many different health conditions in order to restore balance and health in the body. Different techniques are used towards a common goal. If you have an interest in pursing TCM therapy for your pet, consulting a TCM practitioner can help determine which method(s) are best for your pet. Veterinarians who specialize in TCM (certified veterinary acupuncturists) can be found through the Chi Institute of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (www.tcvm.com) or the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (www.ivas.org).