



Veterinarian Tricia Hartwig uses electroacupuncture on Annie, a 10-year-old Shepherd mix, at Tender Loving Care Animal Hospital in Longmont. (Lewis Geyer/Times-Call)

# Acupuncture can help your pet

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The ancient practice of acupuncture has become a more commonplace treatment for various issues in both humans and pets. The insertion of needles at specific pressure points is not so mysterious, says Dr. Tricia Hartwig of Tender Loving Care Animal Hospital in Longmont. Animals can see different results for their health issues through acupuncture, though the widest application for acupuncture is in pain management.

## Dogs

Hartwig says she uses acupuncture in dogs most often, and usually to treat chronic pain resulting from arthritis and other chronic issues like hip dysplasia. "Acupuncture helps the body help itself," Hartwig says. Though it does not cure the disease, it treats the secondary effects and manages pain to create a more comfortable life for dogs with health problems.

She commonly treats dogs with spinal cord issues, arthritic pain and nerves issues with acupuncture, though this treatment is rarely used alone. It is combined with more

traditional treatments to produce a better quality of life. If your older dog is slowing down or not sleeping well, it could be a sign they are experiencing chronic pain, says Hartwig, and acupuncture could help.

## Cats

"Cats are trickier; they're very sensitive," Hartwig says. Because they can quickly tick their skin, acupuncture is more challenging for cats, as the needles are not hypodermic and can be shaken loose. It takes a special individual and special time to treat a cat with acupuncture, she says, but it can be extremely effective.

Hartwig says anesthetizing the cat is an option. While the benefits can be seen usually within four to six weeks, Hartwig has treated a cat who lost its limp after just one treatment. If a cat makes acupuncture too difficult, lasers and acupressure can be alternatives.

## Horses

Horses have huge muscle masses, and pain, growth, and bone and joint issues can lead to compensatory behaviors that leave the body out of balance, Hartwig says.



Approximately 30 needles are used for Annie's electro acupuncture treatment at Tender Loving Care Animal Hospital in Longmont. (Lewis Geyer/Times-Call)

Acupuncture helps the body correct this imbalance caused by its natural overreaction to specific issues. It can also help mitigate issues like muscles soreness and spasms.

More so than with dogs and cats, acupuncture is used for horses in a sports medicine context to aid with sprains and strains. Horses can also benefit from acupuncture if they're having reproductive issues.

Acupuncture can also have benefits for pocket pets and birds, but this requires a specialist. Hartwig stresses that acupuncture is not mysterious and pet owners should not

be afraid of incorporating it into their pet's treatment plan. It is helpful with nerve issues and pain because the points are often located along nerves and it can be used to interrupt chronic neuropathic scenarios, she says.

Acupuncture can also aid with gastrointestinal issues, allergies, high blood pressure and even behavioral issues. The benefits of acupuncture can be seen relatively quickly, and while it may not cure your animal's problem, it could effectively manage a disease's complications.