

Acupuncture for Horses
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE

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ACUPUNCTURE FOR HORSES

Equine Acupuncture

For thousands of years, the most consistently prevalent and popular system of medicine in the world has been Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Even now, it is first-line medicine for a huge proportion of the world's population. It has not achieved these laurels because of mythology, ideology and belief but as a direct result of its manifest benefits. Part of TCM is [Acupuncture](#) which is often used in the modern Western world in isolation but is more properly and more effectively integrated with natural internal medicine and holistic management, lifestyle, and dietary measures to achieve its seemingly miraculous effects. The author prefers not to consider it in isolation but within such a holistic context.

The fundamental belief of Chinese medicine is that of a life force (*Qi* - pronounced *chee*), which circulates throughout the body in a regular and rhythmic twenty-four hour cycle (the ancient equivalent of the modern well-known circadian rhythm), within a series of channels or meridians distributed over the body. These meridians connect the limbs, the internal organs and the exterior of the body, via definite routes. In addition, the life energy must be balanced with respect to *yin* and *yang*, the eternal and ubiquitous opposites of the universe (night and day, cold and hot, wet and dry, female and male, dark and light are just examples of natural and essential pairing of opposites, in our natural world).

The principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine and its inherently holistic attention to diet and lifestyle set out to recreate and re-establish balance, both between *yin* and *yang* and in proper rhythmic circulation of energy, when those have been disturbed in disease. This sounds deceptively simple, but in fact is the very essence of the philosophy.

Acupuncture is the use of needles as part of this strategy. The needles are inserted into precise locations along the meridians where these approach the body's

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surface. They may be inserted at sites far removed from the supposed site of symptoms.

This amazing legacy is also available for horses (equine acupuncture – acupuncture for horses). The usual response in horses is of willing acceptance and profound relaxation during treatment. Often, more than one treatment may prove necessary to initiate the response. Sometimes, there can be an apparent worsening before improvement sets in.

Since needling is part of the balancing process, and imbalance is the root of disease, the scope of horse acupuncture (together with the other [holistic](#) facets of treatment discussed) is vast. It is of particular value in locomotor disorders and back problems (in conjunction with [chiropractic manipulation](#)) but can be used as part of a treatment programme for all manner of metabolic and immune disturbances. It is likely to be only partially effective if used in isolation, rather than combining it with compatible natural internal medicine (e.g. [homeopathy](#) or [herbs](#)) and [diet control](#), along with attention to [saddling](#), [shoeing](#) etc.

Needling is only one way of stimulating acupuncture points. Heat ([moxibustion](#)), [LASER](#), electro-stimulation and pressure are also part of the experienced acupuncturist's repertoire.

If seeking acupuncture for your horse, it is important that this is performed by a veterinary surgeon as a point of law ([Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#)). Sadly there are few veterinary surgeons (veterinary acupuncturists) well-versed in veterinary acupuncture and even fewer in the wider aspects of holistic management. The situation is improving but is still far from satisfactory at present. Always ask your own veterinary surgeon in the first instance, since he or she will have access to specialist lists for referral.

Christopher Day (veterinary acupuncturist) – May 1996

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