

Pain Control
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE

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PAIN CONTROL

Pain is a response to noxious stimulus and is an important mechanism for survival of the animal. It is not possible (or even commendable) to eliminate pain from the animal kingdom but it is our duty to understand it and to control it, where necessary and appropriate. Pain gives notice of a damaging influence and, furthermore, informs the animal when certain movements are potentially able to cause damage or when certain organs or parts of the body are damaged. For this reason, removal of pain itself is not sufficient as a purpose for medicine. What is required is to achieve reduction in pain *via a healing process*. Should pain be too hard to bear at any particular time, then painkilling can certainly be a justifiable temporary purpose, in order to buy time in the short term. Control of pain by natural medicine will therefore take two forms:

- Temporary pain relief in order to make life more pleasant at the time and in order to help the horse to cope with the situation, short term.
- Stimulation of healing which will, as a kind of 'side-effect', reduce pain rapidly and certainly. This is a long term objective.

Temporary pain relief can be achieved via [Acupuncture](#), [Herbs](#) or [Homeopathy](#). Acupuncture needling in particular points, depending upon the site of injury, will produce a numbing effect and can act like a local anaesthetic. In fact, anaesthesia for surgery is possible in this way, so effective can the pain control be. The mechanism is believed to be via the release of endorphins (endogenous painkilling substances or opioids) by the body itself, in response to the needling or via the 'gate effect', whereby pain is intercepted, the lines of communication being 'blocked' or 'engaged' by the needling sensation and stimulus. Many herbs have powerful anodyne (painkilling) properties and can be used for the relief of pain. In fact many modern drugs derive from herbs originally. Such a herb is *Willow* (*Salix*) and the bark is very useful in this context, being the original precursor of aspirin! *Aconitum* was an ancient remedy for the relief of pain but the plant itself is extremely poisonous. Creams or ointments could be made from the plant to rub into painful areas. *Hypericum* (*St John's Wort*) is a powerful painkiller and, used

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as a tincture on a painful injury, can produce seemingly miraculous relief. *Devil's Claw* (*Harpagophytum*), an exotic herb with anti-inflammatory properties, has been used for this purpose too but, while effective to an extent, will also cause suppression of the symptoms and may even delay healing, inflammation being an important part of the healing process. *Arnica* is a very valuable herb used to control pain in case of injury or trauma and can be applied as a lotion or given internally as a homeopathic remedy. A great many riders and horses can testify to the benefits of this remedy. If the acute and severe pain is from colic, the homeopathic remedy *Colocynth* is usually very effective.

To illustrate pain reduction through longer-term healing, we can consider the more chronic conditions of [laminitis](#), [back pain](#), arthritis or [navicular](#) for instance. In these cases, anti-inflammatory agents, whether they be conventional drugs or herbs, can be very counterproductive. They are suppressive of pain, of inflammation and of the healing process itself. Most cases of laminitis, arthritis or navicular will respond well to [homeopathy](#) or to [acupuncture](#) or to both, properly integrated, provided no suppressive drugs are given at the same time. Non-suppressive [herbs](#) may also be very beneficial in promoting healing. Back problems will usually respond well to acupuncture and [chiropractic manipulation](#). What all these therapies do is to stimulate a healing process, thereby achieving not just pain relief, (although that is a great joy to see) but also the likelihood of a return to full work without the need for drugs. Such cases as laminitis (acute and chronic) and navicular, in which the prognosis is generally thought to be quite poor especially in advanced cases, the likelihood of a return to full and normal function is extremely high under the gentle but powerful influence of homeopathic healing. The body has repair and healing mechanisms aplenty, all the therapy needs to do is to stimulate and direct that process, at the same time giving full attention to diet and any other potential adverse factors, so that healing can take place rapidly and uneventfully.

Written by Christopher Day – October 1997

See also:

<http://www.chiropractic-vet.co.uk>

<http://www.equineacupuncturevet.co.uk>

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