

# **INTEGRATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE**

## **Dr. Carol Vavra**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **What is Integrative Veterinary Medicine?**

Integrative Veterinary Medicine is using many different treatment options to help our pets. We firmly believe that our pets need conventional medicine – medications, surgery, vaccines, blood tests, x-rays, but we also believe in using alternative therapies in conjunction with these. Many times conventional medicine is not enough – or has side effects which affect the animal's quality of life. In these cases we can see what other types of therapies may be needed.

#### **What are some of the alternative therapies we can use?**

Some of these therapies are Acupuncture, Chinese herbal formulations, western herbal formulations, supplements, dietary changes, chiropractic, homeopathy, and many others.

#### **How does acupuncture work?**

Acupuncture can affect all major organ systems. It works primarily through the nervous system and energy pathways in the body. When we put the needles into the acupuncture points we are affecting another area of the body in a predictable way.

#### **How will my pet react to acupuncture?**

The acupuncture treatments are done with your pet wide awake and in a comfortable position. Since acupuncture uses needles your pet may have a brief moment of sensitivity when the needle goes through the skin. This is NOT AT ALL like getting

a vaccine or other injection – they will barely feel the needle! Once the needles are in place most animals relax and many fall asleep during the treatment!

### **What conditions respond to acupuncture and integrative medicine?**

Many conditions respond to acupuncture. Some are:

- Arthritis
- Back injuries including disk problems
- Geriatric issues – general pain, immune support
- Chronic renal failure
- Cancer support
- Immune problems
- Paralysis
- Allergy related symptoms
- Vomiting/diarrhea

Like any therapy, some conditions respond better than others and each animal is different.

### **How often and for how long will my pet be treated?**

Treatments last from 10 seconds to 30 minutes, depending on the condition treated and the method used. There are many ways of stimulating the acupuncture points- pressure, needles, applying heat to a point, and electro acupuncture. Patients are usually treated 1-2 times a week for the first week or two, and then the treatments are spaced out more. Once a positive result is seen I will work with you and we will decide when your pet needs to be seen again. A positive result is often seen within the first 4-6 treatments, and many times earlier, depending on the condition being treated.

## **How safe is acupuncture?**

Acupuncture is one of the safest therapies available if practiced by a competent acupuncturist. Side effects are rare. Occasionally the animal's condition may worsen temporarily before the positive results are seen – this is normal and expected. They may get very tired after their treatment and need to sleep for the rest of the day.

## **What is electro acupuncture?**

Electro acupuncture can be used for many conditions and helps increase the healing effects of the acupuncture. We use an electro acupuncture machine which is powered by one 9v battery and is similar to devices used by chiropractors and in sports medicine to stimulate muscles. During the normal acupuncture treatment I may hook up some needles to the machine to get a greater effect. The animals usually find this very relaxing, especially those being treated for painful arthritis or back injuries.

## **You can do acupuncture on my CAT??**

Yes! We can normally treat cats without any problems. It is important to keep a calm environment and have the owner there to reassure their cat. A special treat, like deli meat, a little cheese, or other special food can also help.

## **What about acupressure? Does this work?**

Acupressure – applying pressure to the points – can be used at home to help your pet in-between treatments! I will show you 1-2 points at each treatment and ask you to treat your pet at home.

## **Why do you also prescribe herbals?**

Chinese herbals work on the same principle as acupuncture. They may not only help heal your pet and also help prevent disease by strengthening your pet's immune system and other defenses. In Chinese medicine they are actually considered more important than acupuncture because they are used to strengthen the entire body and change the way the body reacts to disease.

## **Why do you say Chinese herbals are a prescription item when I can get them online?**

Supplements and herbals have become very popular for both humans and animals and are available online and in many stores – unfortunately there is very little quality control out there. Unless we get our products from reputable companies we have no way of knowing if they contain what they should contain, or if they have been stored properly. In both these cases the product may not work at all or, even worse, may have a detrimental effect on your pet. I only deal with 3 herbal companies and 2 supplement companies. They only sell to licensed professionals and have staked their reputation on their products. Therefore I have also staked MY reputation on the fact that the herbals and supplements I prescribe for your pet are EXACTLY what they say they are.

## **What kinds of supplements are important?**

This depends on many things – age of your pet, what we are treating, how they are doing on their medications and herbals, what foods they are eating... I may prescribe vitamins and antioxidants for one pet, and micronutrients for the next.

## **My pet is doing great on his food now. Are you going to change it?**

Maybe, maybe not! If your pet has an ongoing illness we may need to make some basic changes in addition to other treatments. Our pet's diet (and OUR diet) is the basis for great health and we will discuss how this easy change can make a huge difference in your pet's health!

## **Why does the first appointment take so much longer than a normal veterinary appointment?**

We will do a lot of talking – discussing your pet's health, environment, history, habits, and then we will do an acupuncture treatment if this is needed. It is important that your pet remain as calm as possible for the treatment - this is why the pace of the appointment is slower and not as hectic!

## **How do I know if my pet would benefit from Integrative Medicine?**

Does your pet have a disorder or disease that is not quite under control? Do the medications cause side-effects? Do you want your older pet to have more energy and interact with the family more? MANY pets will benefit from Integrative medicine. It can be as easy as changing the diet and adding some supplements, to having acupuncture treatments. During the initial appointment we will talk a lot about our expectations and how I think I can help your pet. I will then offer you all of my recommendations for further care.

If you have questions about your pet but are not ready to make an appointment please call or email me and I will certainly get back to you! I cannot give out specific advice or prescribe any supplements or herbals without seeing your pet and reviewing records but I can certainly answer general questions.

**I would really like my pet to have acupuncture but I'm sure you won't be able to stick needles in him! What do I do?**

Most people believe this, but there have been very few animals I could not treat! Remember – this is NOT like getting vaccines. The needles are tiny and the treatments make the animals feel good. I will never restrain a fearful pet to do acupuncture - they will not get any benefit from the treatment if they are panicked. We will usually know during the first appointment, when I take the history and examine your pet, if we can do the acupuncture. The great thing about integrative medicine is that there will be many other therapies we can use to help your pet if I truly can't do acupuncture on him or her!

**If you are treating my pet do I continue seeing my primary veterinarian at Merrimack Veterinary Hospital?**

Yes – You will still go to your vet for your pet's other needs. If your pet needs more diagnostic tests for the problem I am treating I will recommend you have the tests done.

**I go to a chiropractor for my back. She also does acupuncture. Can she treat my pet too?**

Sometimes. Some human acupuncturists can take classes to treat animals at veterinary clinics. Needless to say this would not be the best care for your pet! Veterinarians who are certified in acupuncture take extensive classes, receive hours of hands-on instruction, have testing and case studies required of them and also have to train with a veterinarian who is already certified.

## **How do I make an appointment?**

The best way to make an appointment is to first talk to one of the veterinarians at Merrimack Veterinary Hospital and bring your pet in for an appointment with them. Once your pet has received a complete physical exam and any diagnostic tests then I can talk to you about what acupuncture and other therapies can do for your pet.

You can call the hospital directly and the receptionist will take down your information and I will get back to you. We will then set up a time for the appointment. The first appointment will be about 1 ½ hrs long (includes taking a history, reviewing notes, and an acupuncture treatment). Follow-up appointments are usually 45 minutes long.