

THE NEW YORK THOROUGHBRED



NEW YORK THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS, INC.

Something Old Something New

by Babette Gladstein, VMD, Certified Acupuncturist

The following questions were asked of Dr. Babette Gladstein, VMD, who specializes in the treatment of racehorses. Acupuncture and therapeutic ultrasounds are the mainstays of her equine physical therapy practice.

Treating Horses with Acupuncture

Q What is acupuncture?

A Acupuncture is an ancient healing technique that produces an abundance of good health effects by restoring the natural flow of energy (qi) in the body. It also acts as an analgesic providing pain relief. The Chinese first began using acupuncture over 3,000 years ago to treat humans as well as horses. It was introduced into the United States in the latter part of the 20th Century as an alternative therapy for humans. More recently it has gained widespread acceptance as an alternative treatment for horses and other animals.

Q How do I know it's safe for my horse?

A Acupuncture is one of the safest therapies available when practiced by a competent, licensed acupuncturist. Approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association, this treatment balances the body's healing system without administering chemicals.

Q How does it work?

A The treatment involves inserting extremely fine needles into specific points on the body to relieve pain and stimulate muscles. There are hundreds of points located along meridians (or pathways) in the body, which link to internal organ systems. By inserting needles into these points, we stimulate a horse's normal nerve function in the muscular, skeletal, hormonal and cardiovascular systems, thereby reducing pain and discomfort.

Q What are the most common horse ailments that acupuncture is used for?

A We routinely treat muscle soreness, tendon and ligament tears, arthritic joint changes, and neuropathies (nerve dysfunction). We also treat allergies, skin problems, and respiratory problems. Acupuncture also prevents illness by enhancing the immune system. Here is the fuller list of conditions for which acupuncture is used in treating horses:

Musculoskeletal ailments:

- Cold back syndrome

Acupuncture has been a key part of Eastern medicine for millennia. It has come into Western practice only in the last thirty-odd years. Eight years ago, The New York Thoroughbred first reported on its "up and coming" applications in equine medicine. Today, its use is much more widespread. Ultrasound, on the other hand, is still relatively new in worldwide practice - first employed about a quarter-century ago, mostly for diagnosis. Today, it has found a therapeutic niche, and it is serving our horses well.

- Undiagnosed lameness
- Laminitis & Navicular disease
- Tendonitis
- Pain relief
- Muscle soreness
- Aid in preventing "Tying Up"

Respiratory problems:

- "Bleeders"
- COPD/Hay dust cough/Hay allergy
- Chronic nasal discharges, cough, heaves

Gastrointestinal Disturbances

- Colic

Q Why use acupuncture when there is no injury or obvious health problem?

A Acupuncture also functions as a wellness treatment, stimulating a horse's immune system to ward off sickness and stress-related problems. It does this by releasing various hormones and natural cortisol, which is an anti-inflammatory agent. In addition, acupuncture increases blood circulation, promotes red and white blood cell production, lowers blood pressure, and increases the rhythm and stroke volume of a horse's cardiovascular system.

Q How can acupuncture help my horse race faster?

A Since acupuncture prompts the release of B-endorphins (pain killers) into the blood stream and spinal cord, it also promotes relaxation. B-endorphins are "feel good hormones." They are

up to 100 times more potent than morphine and help increase the serotonin level. If your horse feels relaxed, he/she will perform better. Horses require flexible, tension free and fatigue-free muscles in order to race to their maximum potential.

Q Won't the needles hurt my horse?

A Absolutely not. During each treatment, approximately fifteen to thirty needles might be administered. These sterile, disposable stainless steel needles are flexible and hair thin. Horses may react slightly when the needles penetrate the skin in sensitive areas. But once in place, the horses often find the treatment pleasurable. Some fall asleep during a session, which can last approximately 30 minutes. Sometimes we use a low-voltage electric current to further stimulate the needles. This activates more B-endorphins in the brain and triggers additional pain relief and muscle relaxation.

Q How often should an animal be treated?

A Our animal patients are often treated once a week for a period of time that is determined by the condition that's being treated.

Q How quickly will I see results?

A The physical benefits of acupuncture are potent and often realized immediately. Acupuncture can improve comfort and attitude, and potentially transform a mediocre performance into a winning one.

Q What was your first experience with acupuncture for horses?

A While attending the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical School, an Olympic level, eventing horse was hospitalized there for several months with complications from multiple fractures of her leg. The mare had gone through many surgeries and was not healing well. Everyone who treated her believed nothing more could be done, except one anesthesiologist who treated the horse every few days with acupuncture and electrical stimulation. These treatments proved so effective that the mare was able to return home to be bred.

Q Is there anything different about treating horses with acupuncture than how humans are treated?

A The way that humans and animals react to acupuncture is very similar. However, the anatomy

of humans and horses are obviously different. Any animal can be successfully treated with acupuncture provided the veterinarian is fully versed in the anatomy of that animal. After the Chinese published clinical veterinary studies during the 1960s that formally established its efficacy on dogs, horses and other animals, veterinarians in the United States began studying it as a treatment option. Today, any licensed veterinarian must undergo rigorous training specific to the treatment of animals before practicing animal acupuncture.

Q Are there any conditions you wouldn't treat with acupuncture?

A We don't use acupuncture to treat infections or cancer, although it can provide pain relief to an animal with cancer.

Q What are its advantages over traditional veterinary practices?

A One huge advantage is that acupuncture doesn't harm the animal. At the same time, it has tremendous healing potential. Many traditional veterinary treatments involve drugs, which often produce negative side effects. For example, "Bute" (Phenylbutazone) is a non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory drug frequently used in equine medicine. One of its side effects is to reduce protective gastric juices in the stomach, making horses more susceptible to contracting gastric ulcers.

Treating Horses with Ultrasound

Q What is ultrasound therapy?

A Ultrasound is a medically approved physical therapy that is used to speed up the healing process of soft tissue and bone injuries. It also helps control the pain associated with arthritic joints. After being effectively used on humans for over twenty years, we've recently learned that this natural healing technique works equally well on horses. We especially like the fact that it doesn't involve drugs. We know that drugs can mask pain and potentially prolong injuries; ultimately shortening a horse's racing life.

Q What experience convinced you to treat horses with ultrasound?

A It was a firsthand experience. Several years ago my knees were painful. My orthopedic surgeon told me that I needed to cut down on biking and skiing. Instead, I opted for ultrasound treatments three times a week. Because ultrasound promotes collagen fiber formation, it strengthened the tendons in my knees as it dissolved the small calcium deposits in the joint. I avoided knee surgery and no longer feel any pain or discomfort there. When I first heard that ultrasound was successfully being used on horses, it made complete sense to me.

Q How does it work?

A First of all, this therapy is completely non-invasive. It works very similarly to heat therapy except that it utilizes high-energy sound waves rather than heat. We use an ultrasound probe to send high-energy sound waves into desired tissue. These sound waves create vibrations that stimulate the reproduction of DNA within the cells of

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damaged tissue. Thus the cell multiply more rapidly, accelerating the healing process. Ultrasound also decreases swelling which improves vascularization, or blood flow. The increased blood flow also speeds up the healing of sores and surgical wounds. Finally, and very importantly, ultrasound stimulates the release of serotonin, a natural pain blocker.

Q Which horse conditions benefit from being treated with ultrasound?

A Ultrasound effectively treats soft tissue injuries as well as chronic joint conditions. Many other conditions are also successfully treated with ultrasound. Here's a list of the most common treatable ailments:

- Tendon and ligament injuries-including splints
- Sore feet and hoof inflammation
- Muscular pain- backs, shoulders, triceps, etc.
- Wounds and lacerations
- Reduction of scar tissue
- Joint pain and arthritic changes (ankles, knees, stifles, hocks)
- Pain and muscle spasms—Muscle tone reduction - tying up
- Racing soreness
- Swelling & edema
- Bone remodeling - bucked shins
- Bursitis, (shoulders)

Q How do we know that it's working?

A Horses often experience clear and immediate results. Tendon tears and other injuries fill in faster and the collagen fibers within the tendon tend to gain better tensile strength. Because ultrasound reduces swelling and improves circulation, it increases the pliability of muscles, ligaments and tendons. Therefore, horses function more effectively. Trainers often tell us that after ultrasound therapy the horse is looser and exhibits a more comfortable gait and fuller range of motion, particularly after their hocks and backs are treated.

Q How quickly does it work?

A The speed and effectiveness of ultrasound greatly depends on how frequently it's done. Trainers like the fact that it usually doesn't require taking the horse out of training.

Q How do I know if my horse will benefit from ultrasound?

A Before utilizing this treatment, a veterinarian who is trained in this procedure should conduct a thorough evaluation of your horse's condition.

Q Why is ultrasound so effective on horses' feet?

A Big webs of veins circle the horses' feet and go into their hooves. So when a horse injures that area, they often experience a lot of swelling. We know that ultrasound increases blood flow to the foot, effectively cooling down that area. It also reduces swelling and speeds up the healing process. Ultrasound is an effective way to increase the blood flow without causing any side effects. Exercise riders claim that a horse's foot action improves with ultrasound therapy.

Q What are the results of using ultrasound on open wounds and lacerations?

A We've seen some miraculously fast healings of wounds that are sometimes as much as two inches deep. By using ultrasound, the horse is often healed in half the time it normally takes.

Q Why does ultrasound speed up the healing of suspensory, check ligament tears or bowed tendons?

A By enhancing blood flow, ultrasound increases collagen content and properly realigns collagen fibers. It also helps improve collagen elasticity and eases stretching which increases a horse's range of motion.

Q When do you advise that I have my horse treated with ultrasound rather than acupuncture?

A It all depends on what the examination reveals. If we see that a horse is suffering from extreme muscle soreness, we'll start with ultrasound. Otherwise we prefer to start with acupuncture, which is a proven analgesic for pain. If a horse just needs a good generalized tune-up, it's also better to start with acupuncture. Acupuncture and ultrasound work well in conjunction with each other.

Q How do I know that I can trust ultrasound?

A Ultrasound is an AVAMA, AMA, AAEP approved treatment. Many star athletes and their teams, including the Jets, Yankees and the Knicks, employ ultrasound in their health regime.

Q Can these treatments be economical for the trainer and owner?

A We have various programs and service options. The true economic benefit is your horse's health and well-being. But by increasing the longevity of your horse, we're also enhancing your investment.

Note: If you'd like to know more about acupuncture, ultrasound or other alternative veterinary treatments, you can visit Dr. Gladstein's website at www.animalacupuncture.net.

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