

Equine Acupuncture

Carolina Medina, DVM, CVA, CVCH, CCRT
Clinical Assistant Professor
Acupuncture and Rehabilitation Service
University of Florida Veterinary Medical Center
medinac@ufl.edu
(352) 294-4376

The origin of veterinary acupuncture can be traced to the primitive society (2,200-3,000 B.C.) in China. Crude stone “acupuncture needles” called *bian-shi*, from the Neolithic period made around 8,000 years ago were discovered in China. These are considered the first “needles” used to stimulate acupuncture points. Sharp metal needles from the Shang Dynasty (1,600-1,100 B.C.) were also found which enabled deeper insertion into acupuncture points. The first Chinese medical texts to describe the pathways of acupuncture points were discovered in the Hunan Province, China in 1973. These texts were written prior to the third century B.C. One of the first veterinary acupuncture texts, *Bole’s Canon of Veterinary Acupuncture*, was written by Sun Yang, aka Bole Zhenjing, a Chinese veterinarian that lived from 659-621 B.C. In China today, acupuncture is still widely used in both animals and people.

Acupuncture is defined as the stimulation of a specific point (acupuncture point) on the body with a specific method, resulting in a therapeutic effect. Recent research shows that most acupuncture points are located in areas on the skin of decreased electrical resistance or increased electrical conductivity. This can be measured by using a point finder, acupoint detector, or AC dermometer. In addition, it has been found that acupuncture points are closely associated with nerves and blood vessels. There are 173 acupuncture points in horses and 361 points in people.

Acupuncture can be used to treat a variety of conditions such as pain, arthritis, muscle spasms, injured tendons or ligaments, colic, founder, navicular disease, non-sweating, Sweeney, Wobbler’s syndrome, nerve paralysis, behavioral disorders, infertility, skin disease and improving the overall quality of life in chronic diseases. While acupuncture is typically considered to be a safe and minimally invasive modality, there are some conditions that warrant caution or contraindication. For example, caution must be used when treating debilitated horses. Generally, fewer needles and less stimulation are used. When needling points around the eye, care must be taken to protect the eye. When needling the chest or abdomen, short needles placed in a horizontal plane should be used. It is contraindicated to needle directly into a scar, abscess, tumor, mass, umbilicus or skin lesion. Specific points around the abdomen and lower back are contraindicated in pregnancy. Electro-acupuncture is contra-indicated in patients with a history of seizures or those who have a pacemaker.