

ALI WEBBER MVB MRCVS



Ali qualified in Padua, Italy in 2002 and since then has been a dedicated small animal vet. Ali has been with Blake Veterinary Group Ltd since 2006

Another new face on the pet page this month. I am Ali Webber and I have been a qualified Vet for 7 years and with Blake Vets for just over 3 of them.

Many of the staff at the practice have become quite excited in the past few weeks as I have recently become one of The Association of British Veterinary Acupuncture's latest members, having completed an extensive and gruelling course on the subject.

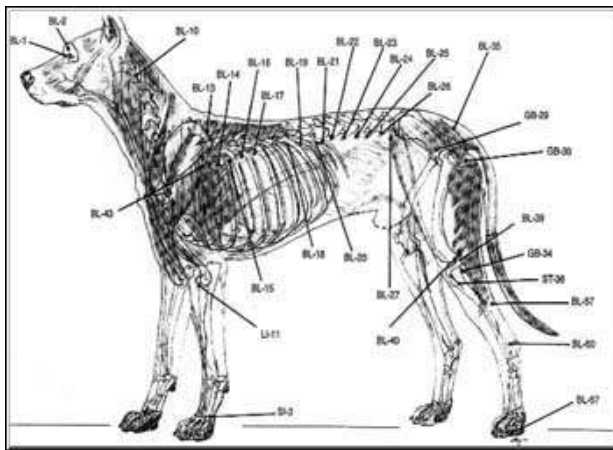
Obviously when you are training in this discipline you can't practice on the public's pets so a number of the staff pets and even some of the staff have undergone sessions with me. Many thanks to Meg the 14 year old border collie and Stuart the 40ish year old practice manager who have both had me sticking needles into them while I was practicing and I am still desperate to get busy sticking them into Richard Bruce to help his stiff neck!

There are lots of people who think that acupuncture is an amazing idea but almost as many who think it is just a load of rubbish. It is important to note that recently there have been changes in the NHS and they are now encouraging the use of acupuncture within the framework of the nation's health.

Acupuncture sits firmly within the area commonly known as "complementary Medicine" and this is an important thing to realise. It is there to complement existing treatments to accelerate recovery. There are two branches of Acupuncture; they are Chinese and western.

Chinese acupuncture is part of the traditional Chinese medical tradition. It seeks to balance the flow of energy through the body harmoniously. Disease is the result of blockages of the circulation of energy. Acupuncture addresses these blocks. Stimulating carefully selected points on any of the body's energy meridians stimulates energy flow.

Western acupuncture is all about stimulating the muscles and the nerves at certain points. Often superficial stimulation generates many responses within the animal's nervous and endocrine system. It can affect muscles, and the circulatory, reproductive, digestive and urinary systems, as well as antibody production and hormone output. Acupuncture increases the body's release of natural painkillers - endorphin and serotonin and modifies pain pathways in the brain and spinal cord.



In simple terms your spinal cord can be considered part of the brain and it connects the nerve endings to the part of your brain that controls healing. By stimulating the nerves in certain parts of the body you can induce a healing process naturally.

I have been a dedicated small animal vet for some time and whilst I really enjoy what I do I wanted to expand my skills and decided that western acupuncture was the area I would explore as it was not an alternative to what I do but definitely an addition and another skill that can potentially help poorly pets.

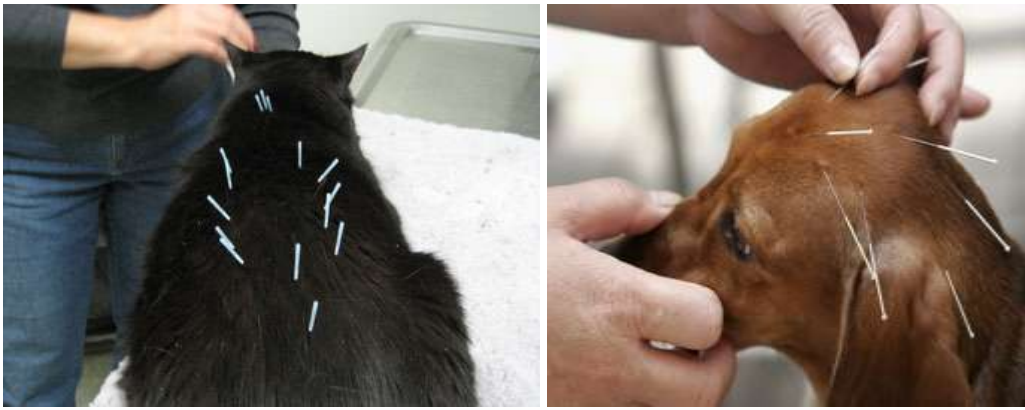


I use high quality Japanese acupuncture needles that are only a hair's breadth wide, and yet are very strong, but flexible.. As you can see from the photograph they are ultra-fine single use, sterile acupuncture needles

The first session is about 30 minutes long and includes a full check up of the animal, to make sure that everything else is ok. The actual time the acupuncture treatment takes is about 20 minutes, it takes a little time to apply the needles and they should be left in place for about 10-15 minutes. Generally the animal does not need to be sedated in any way and can, depending on where the needles have been applied, wander round while the needles are in place.

Acupuncture has been used amongst the equine fraternity for some time and is quite common, it is less frequently used in small animals though this is starting to change as more vets and clients become aware of the success it can have. The most common uses for acupuncture in cats and dogs are:-

- Neck, back, hip, stifle or elbow pain e.g. arthritis
- Back problems
- Urinary incontinence in bitches and retention in cats
- Lameness of unknown origin.
- Any chronic (long-standing) musculoskeletal problem
- Skin complaints (atopy)
- Accelerate skin healing e.g. with chronic lick granuloma
- Chronic feline cystitis
- Feline constipation
- Feline over grooming (cats often over groom when in pain)



Often after treatment animals may exhibit behavioural changes, with improved appetite and demeanour, as well as obvious pain relief. Some pets are very responsive to acupuncture and will show dramatic improvement after one treatment. The vast majority however will respond gradually over a period of time. On average 4-6 treatments are required. These are given weekly initially with gradually increasing intervals, until the desired effect is achieved. The frequency of treatments depends on the individual animal's needs, but regular top-ups are usually required to maintain the therapeutic effect

It is important to note however that some patients along with some diseases will not respond to acupuncture treatment. As each treatment is specifically tailored to an individual through extensive history taking and detailed examination, the protocol used will vary from animal to animal. Animals on the whole accept needling very well, and in fact may become very relaxed. Occasionally animals become very tired or drowsy for up to 24 hours after treatment.

It is really important to remember that a Veterinary Surgeon (or a qualified veterinary nurse under direct supervision of a vet) is the only person permitted to give acupuncture treatment to an animal. Only a vet can diagnose an animals' condition, recommend the right course of treatment and administer that treatment. Vets who perform acupuncture are properly trained and usually members of the Association of British Veterinary Acupuncture

It is good to see that many pet insurance companies have decided to cover acupuncture treatment costs as part of their policies, so please check your pet policy.

Acupuncture should not be the treatment of last resort but form part of your pet's treatment from the very start. It is particularly successful in pain management and in time could reduce the amount you spend on medications for your pet.