

Integrative Medicine Guide for Veterinarians:

Common Indications for use of Acupuncture or Herbal Medical Therapy in Small Animal Practice

Integrative Medicine combines the most appropriate treatments from conventional medicine and surgery with acupuncture (AP) or other modalities such as Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM). Integrating therapies from several different major medical systems greatly improves our ability to treat disease, especially chronic and inflammatory conditions. **This approach can significantly improve quality of life and extend the lifespan of patients by months to years.** The most common indications for integrative treatment are:

Arthritis, Musculoskeletal Pain Treatment of mild-moderate M/S pain is the #1 use for AP in veterinary medicine. It is an **extremely effective anti-inflammatory therapy** and may allow reduction or even elimination of NSAIDs being used chronically for arthritis pain. **Ideal for pets that can't tolerate NSAIDs**, and can be used alone or combined with other analgesics, prn. Also used in acute injuries and in canine athletes to decrease inflammation locally. AP will **accelerate healing/return to function in post-surgical rehab for ortho conditions and IVDD.**

Chronic Renal Failure AP and Chinese herbal medicine are the only therapies we have that can increase renal perfusion and improve kidney function. **This treatment can completely reverse azotemia in many cases of CRF.** Most animals begin eating better, become more active, and will have **significant improvements in BUN & Cr.** Conventional treatment (e.g. SC fluids, PO₄ binders, etc.) can be used right alongside, prn.

IVDD **Both surgical and non-surgical patients have a better outcome when treated w/AP.** Time to recovery is shorter, and loss of function including muscle atrophy and residual PPDs is minimized. This therapy allows owners to see concrete signs of recovery much sooner, which decreases the likelihood that they will elect early euthanasia for paralyzed pets.

GI Conditions, IBD Many IBD patients treated with AP +/- herbal can be completely weaned off of chronic steroids or other immune suppressants, and most can at least achieve dose reductions. Other GI problems such as chronic vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, and hepatic lipidosis in cats are also often responsive to this therapy. Electroacupuncture is used for treating **motility disorders** and can sometimes be helpful with cases of **feline megacolon.**

Neurological Disease AP can be extremely effective for various neurological conditions. It can potentially keep **degenerative myelopathy** dogs on their feet for many more months or even years. Also used to treat facial paralysis, L-S stenosis, peripheral neuropathy, unresolved vestibular dz (chronic residual head tilt), and can resolve or improve most cases of idiopathic **bunny head tilt.** In cases of **idiopathic epilepsy**, an appropriate herbal Rx often allows the use of lower doses of conventional meds while still maintaining excellent seizure control.

Cancer Treatment Chinese herbal Rx are often safely combined with chemotherapy or metronomic tx, though can be used alone if the owner declines Ctx. However, integrative therapy provides the most powerful anti-cancer protocol available. **Extended lifespans for months to years beyond the conventional prognosis** can be expected in the majority of cases. An appropriate herbal Rx can significantly delay tumor growth and spread. In fact, several have been developed into pharmaceutical chemotherapy agents, e.g. vincristine, paclitaxel, etoposide.

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Cancer–Supportive/Palliative Care AP is frequently used supportively in human and veterinary cancer patients. It can often make the pet feel significantly better, increase appetite and energy, preserve mobility, and help support the pet through chemotherapy.

Urinary or Fecal Incontinence Many (30-40%) cases can be resolved or significantly improved with AP +/- herbal. These can also be added on if response to PPA is incomplete.

Lick granuloma **AP is the “gold standard” treatment used to accelerate superficial wound healing** due to its ability to significantly increase local perfusion. It is generally more effective than cold laser therapy, though laser can be very beneficial for superficial wounds if AP is not available. AP can often permanently resolve a lick granuloma if the licking behavior is a response to pain (including referred pain) rather than due to anxiety or OCD,

Sterile cystitis/Feline interstitial cystitis (FLUTD) AP/herbal can help to resolve chronic urinary tract inflammation +/- hematuria in cats and dogs; also used to treat residual problems associated with recovery in a recently obstructed cat, e.g. urethral spasm, flaccid bladder.

Chronic Skin and Ear Conditions Addition of an appropriate herbal Rx can significantly improve many dermatological conditions, including atopy. This will **frequently allow gradual dose reductions or sometimes even elimination of the pharmaceutical drugs** (e.g. cyclosporine, pred) needed chronically to manage refractory cases. This approach is often employed to eliminate any undesirable side effects that have occurred due to long term use of these medications, while still controlling the primary condition. For example, appropriate herbal therapy can often resolve skin lesions and other problems associated with **iatrogenic Cushings**.

Potential drug interactions or side effects: Side effects from Chinese herbal (plant-based) preparations are relatively infrequent. Any that occur are dose dependent and will resolve upon cessation of the medicine or dose reduction. Most formulations are fully compatible with conventional drugs, when used as directed. I recommend using **ONLY** herbal preparations that are produced in the U.S.

Ongoing NIH Clinical Trials: There are currently over 150 ongoing clinical trials evaluating the effectiveness of acupuncture and/or Chinese herbal medicine in treating a variety of conditions in humans, including **OA, rheumatoid arthritis, musculoskeletal pain, IBD, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, interstitial cystitis, food allergy, CRF, migraine, stroke, rehab after knee replacement, post-chemo fatigue, depression, xerostomia, and lymphedema.**

