Animals undergoing athletic training can benefit from acupuncture as often as twice a week to once a month. The frequency depends on the intensity of the training and the condition of the athlete.

Q: How should I choose an acupuncturist for my animals?

There are two important criteria you should look for in a veterinary acupuncturist:

1. Your veterinary acupuncturist must be a licensed veterinarian.
2. Your veterinary acupuncturist should have formal training in the practice of acupuncture for animals. (For example, the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society is the only accredited certification program for veterinary acupuncturists.)

In most countries, states, and provinces, veterinary acupuncture is considered a surgical procedure that only licensed veterinarians may legally administer to animals. A veterinarian is in the best position to diagnose an animal’s health problem and then to determine whether an animal is likely to benefit from an acupuncture treatment, or whether its problem requires chemical, surgical, or no intervention.

In the USA, the American Veterinary Medical Association considers veterinary acupuncture a valid modality within the practice of veterinary medicine and surgery, but extensive educational programs should be undertaken before a veterinarian is considered competent to practice acupuncture. Ask your veterinarian about their training. The more your veterinarian knows about the traditional Chinese philosophies and Western scientific bases for acupuncture, the more sure you can be that your animals will be treated properly.

The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting excellence in the practice of veterinary acupuncture as an integral part of the total veterinary health care delivery system. The Society endeavors to establish uniformly high standards of veterinary acupuncture through its educational programs and accreditation examination. IVAS seeks to integrate veterinary acupuncture and the practice of western veterinary science, while also noting that the science of veterinary acupuncture does not overlook allied health systems, such as chiropractic, osteopathy, homeopathy, herbology, nutrition, kinesiology, etc.

IVAS was formed and chartered in 1974. It is the only international veterinary acupuncture organization and has members in many countries. Consequently, it serves a networking and communication function. There are now veterinary acupuncture associations in several countries. However, it is expected that each state or principality eventually will develop local veterinary acupuncture societies to respond to local issues.

(IVAS gratefully acknowledges the writings of Richard Panzer, DVM, MS in the preparation of this pamphlet.)

For further information, write or call:
Q: What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture may be defined as the insertion of needles into specific points on the body to cause a desired healing effect. This technique has been used in veterinary practice in China for at least 3000 years to treat many ailments. The Chinese also use acupuncture as preventive medicine against such problems as founder and colic in horses. Acupuncture is used all over the world, either by itself or in conjunction with Western medicine, to treat a wide variety of maladies in every species of domestic and exotic animals. Modern veterinary acupuncturists use solid needles, hypodermic needles, bleeding needles, electricity, heat, massage and low power lasers to stimulate acupuncture points. Acupuncture is not a cure-all, but can work very well when it is indicated.

Q: For which conditions is acupuncture indicated?

Acupuncture is indicated mainly for functional problems such as those that involve paralysis, noninfectious inflammation (such as allergies), and pain. For small animals, the following are some of the general conditions which may be treated with acupuncture:

- Musculoskeletal problems, such as arthritis or vertebral disc pathology
- Skin problems, such as lick granuloma
- Respiratory problems, such as feline asthma
- Gastrointestinal problems, such as diarrhea
- Selected reproductive problems

For large animals, acupuncture is again commonly used for functional problems. Some of the general conditions where it might be applied are the following:

- Musculoskeletal problems, such as sore backs or downer cow syndrome
- Nervous system problems, such as facial nerve paralysis
- Skin problems, such as allergic dermatitis

In addition, regular acupuncture treatment can treat minor sports injuries as they occur and help to keep muscles and tendons resistant to injury. World-class professional and amateur athletes often use acupuncture as a routine part of their training. If your animals are involved in any athletic endeavor, such as racing, jumping, or showing, acupuncture can help keep them in top physical condition.

Q: How does acupuncture work?

According to ancient Chinese medical philosophy, disease is the result of an imbalance of energy in the body. Acupuncture is believed to balance this energy and, thereby, assist the body to heal disease.

In Western terms, acupuncture can assist the body to heal itself by affecting certain physiological changes. For example, acupuncture can stimulate nerves, increase blood circulation, relieve muscle spasm, and cause the release of hormones, such as endorphins (one of the body’s pain control chemicals) and cortisol (a natural steroid). Although many of acupuncture’s physiological effects have been studied, many more are still unknown. Further research must be to discover all of acupuncture’s effects and its proper uses in veterinary medicine.

Q: Is acupuncture painful?

For small animals, the insertion of acupuncture needles is virtually painless. The larger needles necessary for large animals may cause some pain as the needle passes through the skin. In all animals, once the needles are in place, there should be no pain. Most animals become very relaxed and may even become sleepy. Nevertheless, acupuncture treatment may cause some sensation, presumed to be those such as tinges, cramps, or numbness which can occur in humans and which may be uncomfortable to some animals.

Q: Is acupuncture safe for animals?

Acupuncture is one of the safest forms of medical treatment for animals when it is administered by a properly trained veterinarian. Side effects of acupuncture are rare, but they do exist. An animal’s condition may seem worse for up to 48 hours after a treatment. Other animals may become sleepy or lethargic for 24 hours after acupuncture. These effects are an indication that some physiological changes are developing, and they are most often followed by an improvement in the animal’s condition.

Q: How long do acupuncture treatments last and how often are they given?

The length and frequency of acupuncture treatments depends on the condition of the patient and the method of stimulation that is used by the veterinary acupuncturist. Stimulation of an individual acupuncture point may take as little as 10 seconds or as much as 30 minutes. A simple acute problem, such as a sprain, may require only one treatment, whereas more severe or chronic ailments may need several or several dozen treatments.

When multiple treatments are necessary, they usually begin intensively and are tapered to maximum efficiency. Patients often start with 1-3 treatments per week for 4-6 weeks. A positive response is usually seen after the first to third treatments. Once a maximum positive response is achieved (usually after 4-8 treatments), treatments are tapered off so that the greatest amount of symptom free time elapses between them. Many animals with chronic conditions can taper off to 2-4 treatments per year.