

PINS AND NEEDLES

Acupuncture benefits in treating horses

Acupuncture has been used for treating a variety of ailments for centuries, mostly in Asia. It was relatively unknown in the U.S. until President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. Over the past 30 years, the practice of acupuncture has grown considerably for treating both humans and animals.

Janet Greenfield Davis, DVM has been practicing acupuncture for about 12

years. When she first started, it was difficult because it wasn't as widely used but now it is primarily what she does in her practice.

The practice has been scientifically studied and clinically proven. Laws are different state-to-state but where she practices in Florida, you have to be a licensed veterinarian to perform animal acupuncture.

Acupuncture has a thousand uses,

including helping to balance the body by promoting blood flow and lymphatic drainage. It has also been successful in reducing inflammation, relaxing or stimulating muscles, improving GI function, reducing pain and balancing fear levels in horses.

"In my practice I use both Eastern and Western medicine. Some people are more open to Western medicine than strictly holistic, herbal or traditional Chinese veterinary medicine. If I am working on a horse and they are particularly painful in one area, I'll recommend they see their regular veterinarian for further diagnosis," Greenfield Davis explained.

There are specific points on the body, mapped out for thousands of years, that have a high density of nerve endings, blood vessels and lymphatic vessels. These pathways, called meridians, run over the entire body from the poll, along the back, down the legs and into the feet.

Those pathways extend into your organs as well as through different nerve roots from the spinal column. The idea is, from a neurological perspective, our body is one big web, one big system. For instance, the stomach meridian starts by the horse's nose, runs throughout the whole body and ends in the hind leg.

To understand how different areas are connected, consider if you or someone you know has ever had sciatic pain. The injury originates in the back but the pain can be felt all the way down your leg and even into your foot. It has a lot to do with neurology.

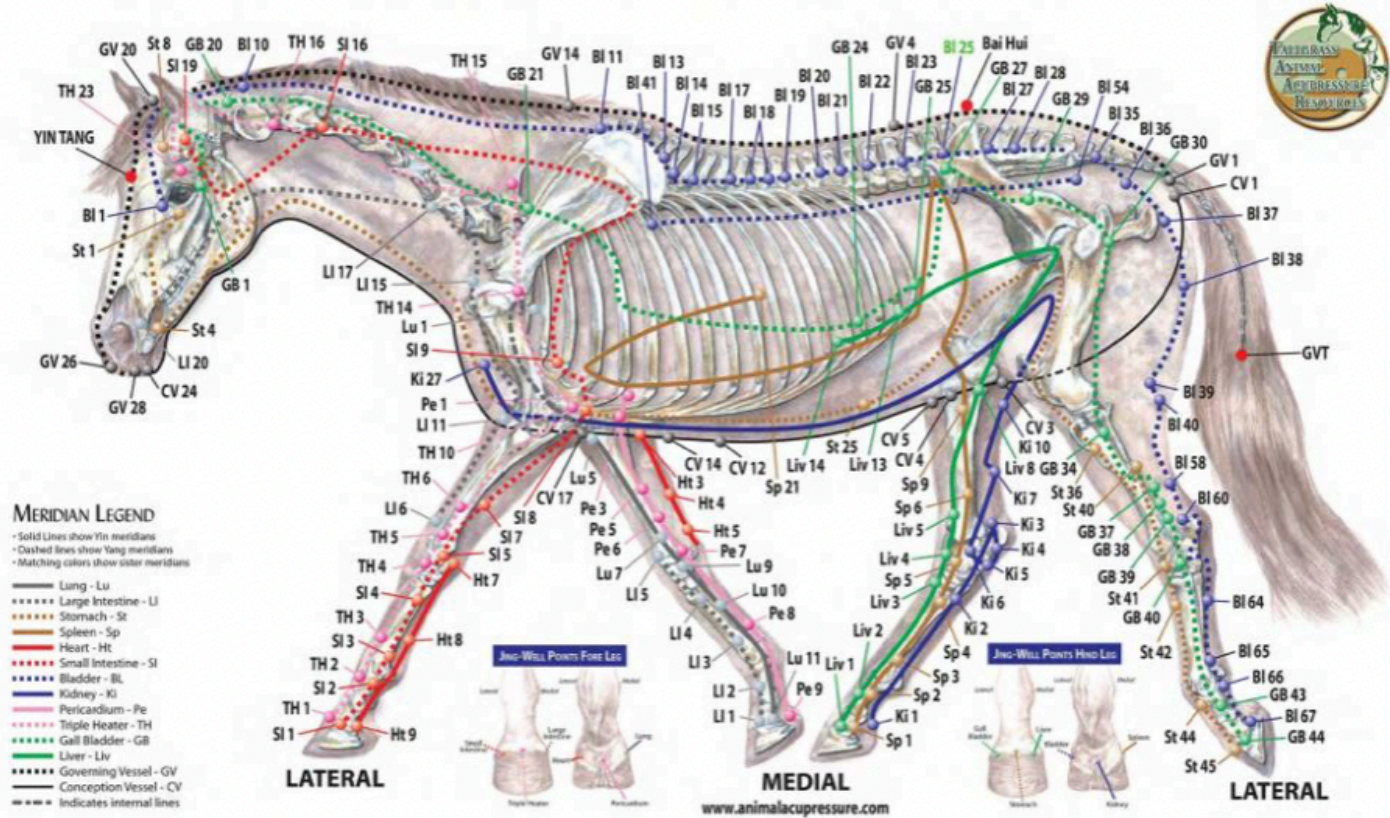
Greenfield Davis said, "When a horse has an impaction and I want to increase gut movement, I treat spots below the stifle in the hind leg and under the tail.



Dr. Greenfield Davis places acupuncture needles in an area used to calm the mind and focus the horse.

EQUINE ACUPRESSURE MERIDIAN CHART

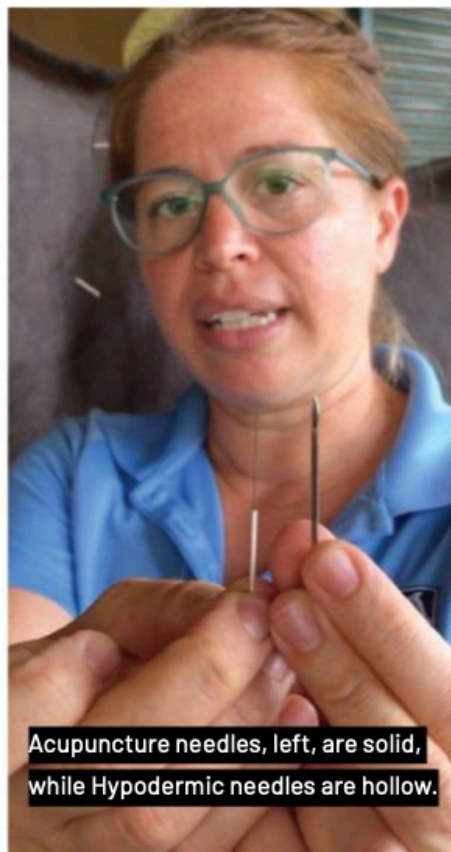
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"Before starting an acupuncture examination, I always check the tongue. I am looking to see if it is purple, swollen, thin or pale. I also check the horse's pulse on the neck to see if one side is stronger than another. That tells me a lot about the horse's yin-yang. Finally, I will scan for sore spots, going over the body with a blunt object and looking at certain pressure points to see where there is pain or discomfort. All of this makes up a traditional Chinese veterinary medicine diagnosis."

The areas where needles will be inserted do not have to be scrubbed like would be done when inserting a hypodermic needle. The biggest reason is hypodermic needles are hollow and acupuncture needles are solid so they don't track dirt and bacteria the same way a hypodermic needle does.

Often, a horse is sore in multiple



places. As a Western diagnostic tool, Greenfield Davis will place needles and see which one eliminates the soreness the fastest. After, when she goes back over the horse, if one spot is no longer painful but another spot is still painful then she knows what remains is usually the source of the problem.

"I will use the meridian in the lower limb to differentiate between a horse having back pain and stomach pain. If I suspect a horse has gastric ulcers and they are painful in their back from guarding their stomach, I will put the needle in a point on the stomach meridian, usually in the leg. If the pain goes away, then the horse likely has ulcers and if the pain doesn't go away, then the root cause is likely back pain," she explained.

Sometimes needles will fall out of the horse during an acupuncture session. This is completely normal.

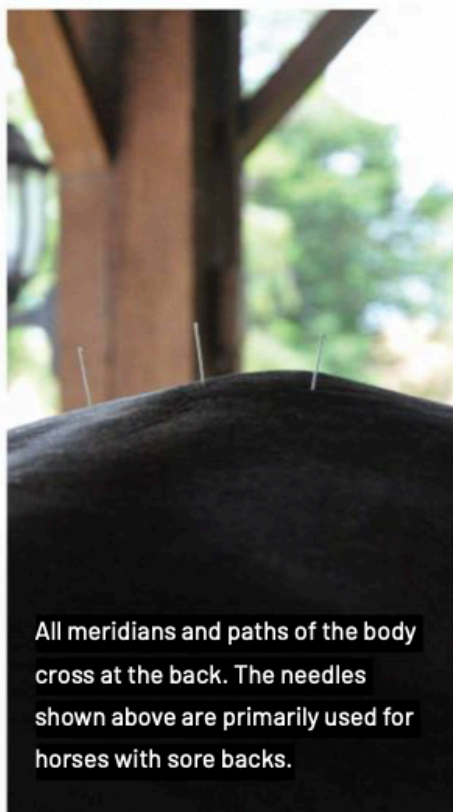


Acupuncture needles release endorphins and serotonin. Horses often yawn, fall asleep or pass gas or manure during treatments.

Sometimes the energy within the acupuncture point is so strong, it pushes the needle out. Other times, the horse's muscles may twitch or spasm causing the needles to eventually work their way out.

When a horse is having an acupuncture session, they may lick and chew, meaning they are relaxed, happy and enjoying the treatment. The needles release endorphins and serotonin, creating a peaceful feeling. Their eyes may get droopy or they may yawn, they will often fall asleep, pass gas or pass manure. On rare occasions you will come across a horse you are just not going to get needles into so you try other treatments. You also have to be very careful of the points you use when treating pregnant patients.

Some horses enjoy the treatment immensely. Some feel the needles



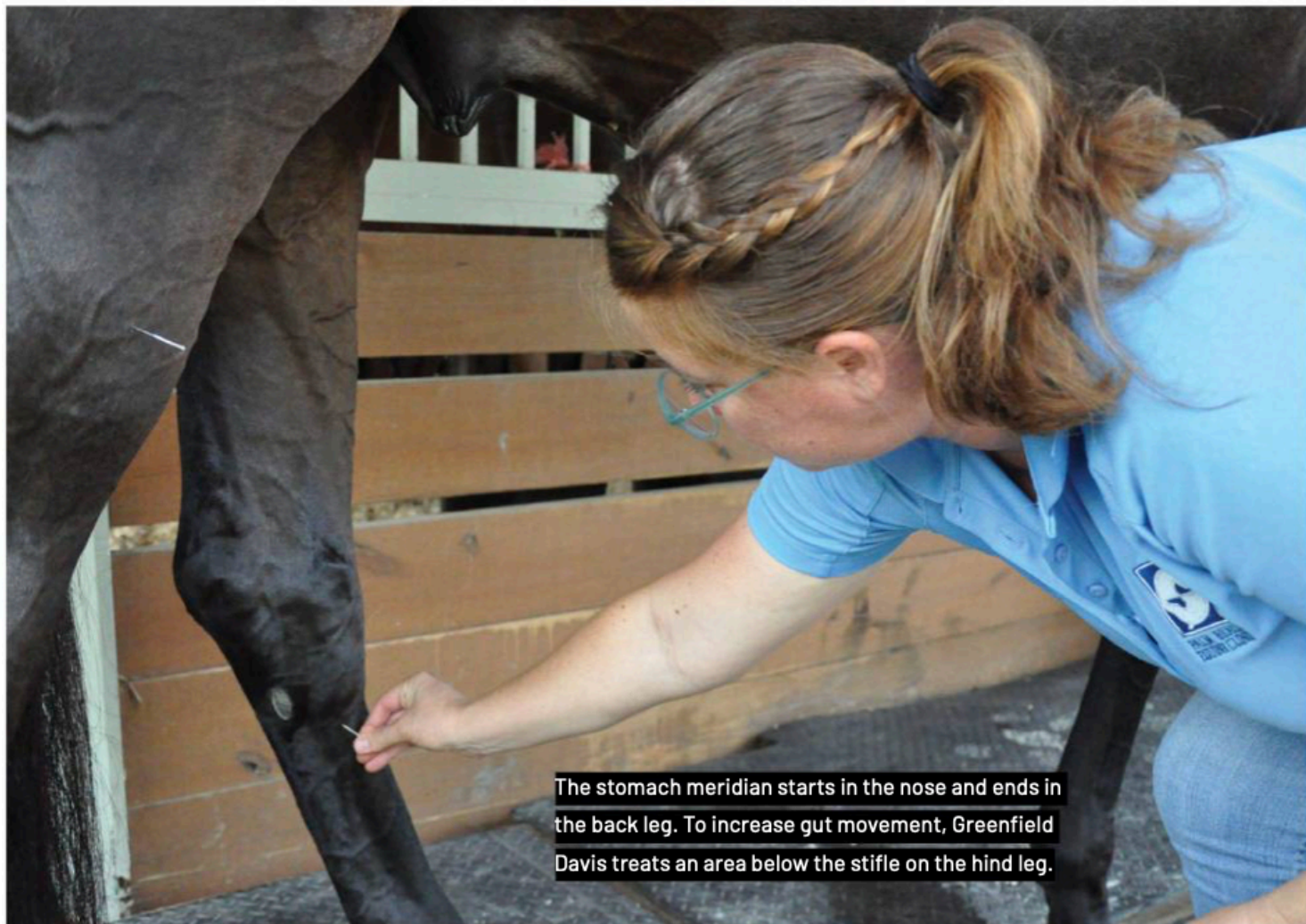
All meridians and paths of the body cross at the back. The needles shown above are primarily used for horses with sore backs.

more than others. If you hit a particularly tight point, what is called stagnation, you may get a reaction to it, whether they start bucking or twitching to try to get the needle out.

"Sometimes they will twitch for a second and then settle down," Greenfield Davis said. "I may leave the needle in, pull it out slightly or adjust it. In other cases I may put it in a different spot that is less painful or I may take it out all together."

Greenfield Davis is continually surprised by the nature in which acupuncture works. And a mix of Eastern and Western Medicine often work well together.

"Some years ago we had a very neurologic horse that could barely stand in its stall. Western medicine was used initially and I followed up with a lot of acupuncture. The horse



The stomach meridian starts in the nose and ends in the back leg. To increase gut movement, Greenfield Davis treats an area below the stifle on the hind leg.

came around and was able to walk and be turned out. That was a very successful case," she said.

"I've also had a lot of kissing spine cases that came through really well with acupuncture. I decrease the pain around the area so the horse can use the muscles and build up proper muscling. They come around and are able to stretch and bend. It also works in muscle atrophy cases, stimulating the muscles to help them start functioning again."

Greenfield Davis' favorite things to work on are impactions because the results are fairly immediate. She said if it isn't something surgical and there isn't something more going on, you pop needles in them and within an hour they will pass manure. Those are her most rewarding cases.

Sometimes because of an impaction,

their intestines get stagnant so acupuncture can really help increase gut movement. It is also useful for post colic pain.

Other ailments that are more persistent or chronic may take several sessions. Greenfield Davis said most times you'll usually see improvement within 24 to 48 hours.

Greenfield Davis has treated polo ponies that are not sweating, or are painful or laminitic.

Horses often receive acupuncture treatments on a regular basis. Acupuncture can be useful before competing just to get the tension out, for horses that have been traveling and also for maintenance or preventive medicine.

"If I go over a horse regularly with acupuncture, I can pick up something that might be bothering the horse

and prevent it from flaring up later," she explained.

Preventively, a treatment a few days before competition is helpful. If a horse is being used regularly during a season, a monthly treatment is ideal.

For those horses that get chiropractic or massage treatments, acupuncture can compliment those very well by helping to relax the muscles, making adjustments easier.

Polo players tend to have large strings so treating all of their horses might be cost prohibitive but if you have one or two horses in your string that need a little extra TLC, acupuncture can be effective. For instance, if you treat your horse with joint injections, acupuncture can prolong the time between injections.

