

Acupuncture for Dogs?!

Bone up on the facts about alternative medicine for your pet.

BY LAUREL LEICHT

FOUR IN TEN OF US routinely use treatments like yoga, herbs, meditation, Reiki, and massage to cure what ails us, and now some of these are going to the dogs. Experts say complementary therapies may help pups of all ages, sizes, and breeds who are suffering from discomfort of the body or mind. Just be sure to check with your vet before proceeding. “Veterinarians understand not only the potential benefits, but also the potential harm an alternative treatment can cause,” says Jerry Klein, DVM, chief veterinary officer of the American Kennel Club. Plus, they should be attuned to what’s best for your particular dog. “Treating a six-pound geriatric Pekingese with metabolic issues can be different from treating a mostly healthy 3-year-old Newfoundland,” notes Klein. If your vet isn’t open to thinking outside the box, Klein suggests getting a second opinion or consulting the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (ahvma.org), a group of vets who advocate for the use of integrative medicine. Here are some popular alternative therapies for four-legged friends:

ACUPUNCTURE

You...get pricked to nix a nagging ache. (Acupuncture is effective for neck and back pain, osteoarthritis, and frequent headaches.)
Your dog...can go under the needle, too; it’s been recommended for musculoskeletal pain, arthritis, asthma, allergic dermatitis, traumatic nerve injury, and some G.I. and reproductive issues. It may well be worth a try: In a study following 181 dogs for up to 24 weeks, Brazilian researchers found that regular acupuncture reduced musculoskeletal pain in the vast majority of cases.

Note: Worried about keeping your pup still while he’s being poked and prodded? “Dogs generally become very relaxed, most likely because of endorphin release,” says Ernie Ward, DVM, founder of DogGone Healthy, a nutritional and behavioral care practice in Calabash, North Carolina. Ward says licking or pawing the needles is rare.

CBD

You...drop a tincture under your tongue or rub a cream on your lower back. Trendy CBD (or cannabidiol, a nonintoxicating compound in cannabis) is used to self-treat everything from anxiety to chronic pain.

Your dog...can swallow a pet-formulated tincture or doggy treat from one of the many brands flooding the market, such as Honest Paws, Dope Dog, and Charlotte’s Web. “Products like these are promoted to address pet ailments like pain, anxiety, and seizures, but the scientific data on CBD use is sparse,” says Tina Wismer, DVM, medical director of the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center. Preliminary findings from a small study at

Colorado State University did show that 89 percent of dogs with epilepsy had less frequent seizures after receiving CBD. A larger study funded by the American Kennel Club Canine Health Foundation is now under way.

Note: Consult your vet first, start with a low dosage, then keep a close eye on your pup. Some dogs have developed signs of toxicity after ingesting CBD products; it’s difficult to tell whether they might also contain THC, which can be poisonous to animals. Call your vet immediately if you notice your pet acting lethargic or disoriented, or walking or behaving strangely.

MASSAGE

You...go for a monthly session to relax your muscles and nerves.

Your dog...is always up for a good rubdown. A vet specializing in rehab might recommend massage to help reduce pain and improve range of motion and circulation.

Note: If the therapist is too rough, the bodywork could wind up worsening an injury, warns Klein. Sensitive dogs may also react by biting the hand that kneads them. Klein suggests seeking a certified canine rehabilitation practitioner or a vet who is certified by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association. They’re trained to get pets back on their paws.

