

Acupuncture & Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine

A modern approach to pain, mobility and recovery for dogs and cats — explained, and referenced.

Hong Kong Pet Patrol • 香港流動獸醫

Acupuncture is one of the treatments we offer at Hong Kong Pet Patrol, most often for pets living with pain, stiffness or nerve injury. This guide explains what it is, how it works, where we use it, and what a course of treatment actually looks like. The published sources are listed at the back, so you can read further if you would like to.

Where acupuncture fits

- It works **through the nervous system** — a measurable, well-described physiological effect.
- We use it most for **spinal and disc injury, chronic joint pain and mobility in older pets, and comfort after surgery**.
- It works best **alongside** your pet's other treatment, not instead of it.
- It is **well tolerated** — most animals settle during a session, and side effects are uncommon.
- In Hong Kong it may only be performed by a **registered veterinary surgeon**.

1 How it actually works

Very fine, sterile, single-use needles are placed at defined anatomical points. In **electroacupuncture**, a gentle low-level current is passed between pairs of needles to strengthen the effect.

What happens next is well-described physiology. The needle engages nerves and connective tissue: beneath the skin it meets collagen fibres, the connective tissue matrix, nerve endings and blood vessels, and more than half of the classical acupuncture points sit over tissue richly supplied with

muscle spindles — the sensors that report muscle tension to the nervous system (Robinson 2012⁸). Stimulating those points releases adenosine locally, a natural pain-damping molecule; in laboratory studies the pain relief disappears in animals lacking the receptor adenosine acts on, which is direct evidence of a real mechanism (Goldman et al. 2010³). From there the effect carries further, with pain signalling modulated at the local tissue, the spinal cord and the brain (Huntingford & Petty 2022⁵).

A traditional map, a modern explanation

The points we use come from a Chinese medical tradition that recorded them centuries before anyone could explain why they worked. Veterinary medicine can now describe that mechanism in terms of nerves, connective tissue and neurotransmitters — as one veterinary review puts it, neuromodulation accounts for nearly all of the effects acupuncture produces (Robinson 2012⁸). We use the traditional map and the modern explanation together. Neither one is decoration.

2 Where we use it

BEST-SUPPORTED USE

Spinal and disc injury (IVDD)

This is where the veterinary evidence is strongest. A 2024 critically appraised review rated the evidence **moderate** that electroacupuncture and acupoint stimulation, added to standard medical management, help dogs with thoracolumbar disc extrusion regain the ability to walk — and regain it sooner (Ng 2024⁷). In a 2025 study of 41 dogs recovering from spinal surgery, **every dog** in the acupuncture-plus-physiotherapy group walked again, at an average of 15 days, compared with 78% of those given physiotherapy alone (Antonucci et al. 2025¹).

Dachshunds, French Bulldogs, Pekingese and Shih Tzus are the breeds we see most often with disc disease, and rehabilitation makes a real difference to how well they come back. We work alongside your surgeon or neurologist, not around them.

PART OF A PAIN PLAN

Arthritis and mobility in older pets

Stiffness in an ageing dog or cat is the commonest reason owners ask us about acupuncture. We use it as one component of a proper pain plan — with weight management, prescribed pain relief, joint support, controlled exercise and small changes at home. In a placebo-controlled trial, owners reported meaningful improvement in the specific everyday activities that mattered to them after a course of acupuncture (Baker-Meuten et al. 2020²).

It is worth considering particularly for pets who **cannot tolerate standard anti-inflammatories** — older cats, dogs with kidney or liver concerns, patients already on several medications. We agree with you at the start what we are trying to improve, then track it, so you can see for yourself whether it is working.

Acupuncture appears among the non-drug options in the 2022 AAHA Pain Management Guidelines for multimodal pain control (Gruen et al. 2022⁴), and is widely used in practice around surgery and through convalescence. We offer it as an addition to your pet's prescribed pain relief — never as a replacement for it.

How we decide whether to recommend it

Not every pet is a good candidate, and we would rather tell you that at the start than sell you a course of treatment. When we do recommend acupuncture, we will tell you what we are trying to change, roughly how long it should take to show, and how we will measure it — so you are never left guessing whether it is working. If what your pet needs is imaging, medication or surgery instead, we will say so.

3 What a session is like

- **Examination first.** Acupuncture follows a diagnosis; it never replaces one. We go through your pet's history, medications and anything that would make treatment unsuitable.
- **The needles are very fine**, sterile and single-use. Most animals settle within a few minutes and a good number fall asleep.
- **A session usually runs 15 to 30 minutes**, with your pet resting comfortably throughout.
- **Treatment is a short course, not a single visit.** Published protocols typically use weekly sessions over about four weeks (Baker-Meuten et al. 2020²), and twice-weekly sessions early on after spinal surgery before easing to weekly (Antonucci et al. 2025¹).
- **We review at the end of the course** and agree the next step with you — continue, space out, or stop.

Treatment in your pet's own home

Hong Kong Pet Patrol is a mobile practice, so acupuncture can be given at home. For an anxious dog, a cat who hates the carrier, or a patient recovering from spinal surgery who should not be moved more than necessary, that removes the most stressful part of the visit — and a relaxed patient is a more comfortable one to treat.

4 Safety

Performed by an appropriately trained veterinary professional, acupuncture rarely causes adverse effects (Merck Veterinary Manual n.d.⁶). Most pets show nothing more than a little drowsiness afterwards, which settles by the next day.

We check suitability before we start. We avoid treatment in pets with clotting disorders or significant immune compromise, we do not needle over a tumour, and if your pet is too anxious to stay still safely we will tell you rather than press on. Anatomical training is what makes the procedure safe — which is exactly why the law treats it as veterinary practice.

5 Who may legally treat your pet in Hong Kong

Articles circulating online — particularly those written for Taiwan or the mainland — refer to a separate "veterinary Chinese medicine" licence and tell you to check a national agriculture register. **Neither exists in Hong Kong.**

Under the **Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529)**, "veterinary surgery" includes "the medical or surgical treatment of animals" (s.2). Acupuncture on an animal falls squarely inside that.

Section 16 restricts it to those registered and holding a current practising certificate, or a permit issued by the Board; section 25(1)(h) makes a breach an offence carrying a fine at level 6 and up to a year's imprisonment⁹.

Registration as a Chinese medicine practitioner for human patients confers no authority to treat animals, and there is no separate veterinary TCM qualification here. Your pet's acupuncture at Hong Kong Pet Patrol is carried out by a **registered veterinary surgeon** as part of a full clinical assessment — and any vet's registration can be checked with the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (vsbhk.org.hk).

6 Is it right for your pet?

That depends on what is wrong, what else is being done for it, and how your pet copes with handling — which is a conversation rather than a leaflet. If your dog is slowing down on walks, hesitating at stairs or the sofa, recovering from spinal surgery, or living with pain that medication alone is not settling, it is worth asking us.

Book a consultation

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House calls across Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. Tell us what you are seeing at home, and we will tell you honestly whether acupuncture is likely to help.

§ References

Harvard author–date referencing. Each citation in the text carries a superscript number pointing to the matching numbered entry below; entries are listed alphabetically.

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4. Gruen, ME, Lascelles, BDX, Collieran, E, Gottlieb, A, Johnson, J, Lotsikas, P, Marcellin-Little, D & Wright, B 2022, '2022 AAHA pain management guidelines for dogs and cats', *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association*, vol. 58, pp. 55–76, viewed 27 August 2026, DOI 10.5326/JAAHA-MS-7292.
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9. *Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance* (Cap. 529) (HK), viewed 27 August 2026, <https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap529>

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This guide is general information about a treatment we offer, not a diagnosis or a treatment recommendation for any individual animal, and it does not replace a consultation with a registered veterinary surgeon who has examined your pet. Please do not start, stop or alter any prescribed medication on the basis of this document.