

## Equine Acupuncture February 2012

Acupuncture is becoming an increasingly popular treatment modality for horses with a variety of ailments. Musculoskeletal conditions such as back pain, decrease in stride, generalized body soreness and stiffness all tend to respond well to acupuncture. Acupuncture can help these conditions, as well as others, by increasing blood flow, relieving muscle tension, and promoting relaxation. One advantage of acupuncture is that it is able to treat areas of the body such as the pelvis and sacroiliac region that often are not particularly responsive to many of our western modalities. While acupuncture is a very effective treatment for a wide variety of problems, it is not a “cure-all” and it is often integrated as an adjunctive therapy in a complete treatment plan.

Acupuncture provides therapeutic effects by neuromodulation. The specific effects of acupuncture needling are mediated through stimulation of the peripheral nervous system (nerves under the skin at the site of needling), which in turn communicate with the central nervous system (nerves within the spinal cord and brain). Via these pathways, substances are released in the brain and spinal cord that have wide-ranging therapeutic effects on the body. Such biochemicals include endorphins and serotonin, two substances that are well-documented to relieve pain and provide relaxation.

Acupuncture needles are very fine and flexible, so there is typically very little reaction to placement of the needle. Some horses are very relaxed and become sleepy as natural endorphins are released during treatment. Some horses are more guarded and may require sedation for treatment, especially if we are treating a sensitive area of chronic pain, such as the back.

