



New Study on Acupuncture with Drugs as Equine Sedation Option

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Acupuncture is not a new technique, but clinical studies proving that this treatment modality works in horses are relatively few and far between. In the journal *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, Brazilian scientists studying alternatives to conventional drug administration for achieving sedation in horses reported that combining low-dose drug administration with acupuncture is a viable option. These findings confirm anecdotal reports from veterinary acupuncturists on this subject.

Being able to use lower drug doses in horses is desirable as it reduces side effects, drug residues, and treatment costs.

Previous research in this field has shown that injecting subclinical doses of certain drugs, such as hormones, at various acupuncture points is safe and effective in horses and cows.

In the study, "Comparison of pharmacopuncture, aquapuncture and acepromazine for sedation in horses," researchers from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Sao Paulo State University evaluated the effect of injecting either saline (aquapuncture) or the sedative acepromazine (pharmacopuncture) at the acupuncture point Governing Vessel (GV) 1. This point is located between the tail and anus and reportedly has a sedative effect.

Eight horses were included in the study and were randomly assigned to receive one of four different treatment protocols at one week intervals:

- The positive control treatment (subcutaneous injection of acepromazine);
- The negative control treatment (subcutaneous injection of saline);
- The aquapuncture treatment (injection of a small volume of saline at GV1), and;
- The pharmacopuncture treatment (injection of a small volume of acepromazine at GV1).

Signs of sedation were observed in all horses thirty minutes following aquapuncture, pharmacopuncture, or the positive control but only horses in the pharmacopuncture group were still sedated 60 minutes after treatment.

While pharmacopuncture treatment resulted in only a mild sedation (albeit longer lasting) compared to the subcutaneous administration of acepromazine, the research group is pleased with these preliminary findings supporting the use of pharmacopuncture in horses.

Rhonda Rathgeber, DVM, PhD from Hagyard Equine Medical Institute in Lexington, Ky, a certified equine acupuncturist, "Administration of drugs at acupuncture points for sedation is not a new technique. Acupuncturists have been doing this for years."

"I have observed horses sedated with pharmacopuncture for major surgeries such as a cesarean section in a mare when the mare or foal are compromised. It is a very useful and beneficial technique in numerous situations," said Rathgeber.

Veterinarians can learn to perform acupuncture, aquapuncture, and pharmacopuncture through

acupuncture courses (e.g., the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society or the Chi Institute).

As described in the study, the next step is to determine the best doses, drugs, and acupoints to achieve optimal effects. Rathgeber agreed that additional research studies in this field published in peer-reviewed medical journals are needed.

Readers are cautioned to seek the advice of a qualified veterinarian before proceeding with any diagnosis, treatment, or therapy.



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