



Acupuncture and Chiropractic Support Therapy For Hunters and Jumpers:

The nervous system, bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments and joints of healthy horses function normally. The circulation to these organ systems is also normal. Such a horse is said to be healthy in all respects. Healthy horses have optimal collaboration of the vertebral column and joints. However sport horses, such as jumpers and hunters, engage in athletics that stretch the limit of normal function of organ systems. Various sorts of subtle injuries occur during training and competition. Such injuries often cause the horse to avoid full use of parts of the body affected with minor aches and pains.

Avoidance of top line muscle pain makes a horse change its way of going. Such changes result in the horse overloading one or more lower limbs. Abnormal body movement causes excessive strain on areas of the body by redistributing the forces applied to various parts of distal limbs. Over time a limb that has been overloaded or overused can become stressed enough that injury will occur. Injuries result in horses exhibiting lameness or performance deficiency.

The opposite can also be true. Pain avoidance of chronic lower limb lameness can have the effect by causing top line muscle and fascial pain. Such prolonged alterations in gait can cause gradual, progressive, functional deterioration of muscles, tendons, and fascia anywhere on the top line from the poll all the way to the tail head.



Most common areas of subluxation complex:

Poll



Withers



Ribs



Lumbar



Sacro-pelvic



Causes of back pain:

There can be many different supporting causes of back pain but common ones observed in sport horses are:

1. Unsuitable or ill-fitting saddle.
2. Improper riding.

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3. Heavy training that began before the horse is fit enough to tolerate such a level of exercise.
4. Inflammation of the splint bone or shin area in young horses.
5. Tendon, ligament, or joint injury to a leg.
6. One-sided exercise causing back strain.
7. Inconsistent training levels and frequencies.
8. Chronic low level degenerative joint disease of any area of the limbs.
9. A diet lacking in appropriate levels of vitamins, minerals, and trace minerals.
10. Hoof pain from foot imbalance.

Performance problems associated with soreness in top line muscles:

1. Unwillingness of the horse to bend or turn.
2. Stiffness approaching and going over fences.
3. Holding the head to the outside when circling.
4. Stilted gallop.
5. Abnormal pelvic slant.
6. Stiffness in the back.
7. Pain response over the back muscles while applying hand and finger pressure.
8. Diminished forward propulsion.
9. Atrophy of top line muscles on the same side of the body as the painful limb.

Massage therapy and physical therapy are important modalities which are utilized to maintain fitness and flexibility in sport horses. Physically moving the soft tissues of the upper body and breaking down fascial adhesions surrounding muscles is done to help restoration of normal function. Muscle relaxation is usually the result. If muscle tension is relieved, more total body relaxation is achieved, and horses have a better chance of performing their sport without discomfort.



Various massage techniques can be employed, but the most commonly used, are stroking and compression, acupressure, and connective tissue massage.

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In some cases general physical therapy is not enough to help musculoskeletal pain. If these situations arise, chiropractic manipulation and acupuncture therapy can offer extra benefit. The goal is to bring the horse back to normal performance levels. Most certainly, lower limb problems have to first be diagnosed and treated before addressing upper body pain and stiffness. A complete physical examination for lameness by a veterinarian is often the first step taken. This step is necessary to determine if lameness or underperformance has occurred from an injury or a chronic degenerative process of the musculoskeletal system. These types of lameness cases are usually best treated traditionally. The bulk of problems, involving degenerative joint disease (arthritis), tendon and ligament injuries, are diagnosed and then treated with medications, surgery, or other advanced modalities.

Difference in emphasis with therapies:

Western-based medicine places emphasis on evidence-based science, concentrating on the cellular level, placing emphasis on individual physiological systems, and using pharmaceutical and surgical intervention to effect a cure. Chiropractic and acupuncture therapies are observation-based, treat the body as a whole and place emphasis on the neurophysiological systems of the body. Chiropractic procedures attempt to restore body parts to a normal relationship with one another. Acupuncture procedures attempt to balance the nervous system and its relationship with the physiological systems of the body. Acupuncture therapy often works well in conjunction with chiropractic procedures to restore normal body function and activity.

The chiropractic term “subluxation” is the central concept of chiropractic therapy. The term is used in chiropractic vernacular to describe an area of the body which has decreased or abnormal range of motion. The horse, mechanically, has a very long neck and body. This body structure contributes to nervous system and muscular system disharmony. Disharmony will eventually result in subluxation occurrences (stiffness and abnormal range of motion) of segments of the upper body. The most common areas involved with horses are the poll, neck, withers, ribs, lumbar area, sacrum and pelvis. To a lesser extent painful occurrences can occur in the TMJ, sternum, shoulder and hips.

Chiropractic therapy, done by a licensed practitioner, is a low-risk, non-invasive, therapy that can be quite helpful for the treatment of subtle lameness and stiffness. Relief of subtle pain can also alter undesirable behavior. During the chiropractic examination process, the veterinarian palpates and motions body segments to determine areas that are painful, or lack normal mobility. These areas are treated appropriately with small force, high speed corrections to the affected segments. Successfully treated areas of the body become relaxed, often painless, and have an opportunity regain normal function in relationship to the rest of the body.

ALBERTA SHOW JUMPERS



Acupuncture therapy can be a very powerful treatment modality for musculoskeletal pain in performance horses. Acupuncture with needles may require patient sedation to place needles and have the needles remain in place. In many cases a small volume of a substance such as a vitamin is injected into the acupuncture point to cause stimulation or sedation of the acupuncture point. The advantage of injecting a liquid into acupuncture points on the body is bi-fold. A liquid substance stimulates the acupuncture point for a longer period of time than acupuncture needles alone. Injecting a liquid into the point allows the veterinarian to quickly remove the needle. This avoids the problem of some horses twitching their skin excessively. Skin movement often causes acupuncture needles to retract and fall out of the acupuncture point position prematurely.

Acupuncture needles can also be used on a painful area to sedate “trigger points” in muscles. In this case the needles are placed directly into the tense, painful muscles, and left there for at least 15 or 20 minutes. This trigger point therapy technique tends to reverse the muscle spasm, which is the primary cause of pain. Trigger point therapy is especially effective in muscle groups in the lumbar and rump area of horses. However meridian therapy is the most commonly used type of acupuncture for musculoskeletal pain and dysfunction. The horse has several acupuncture meridians that course

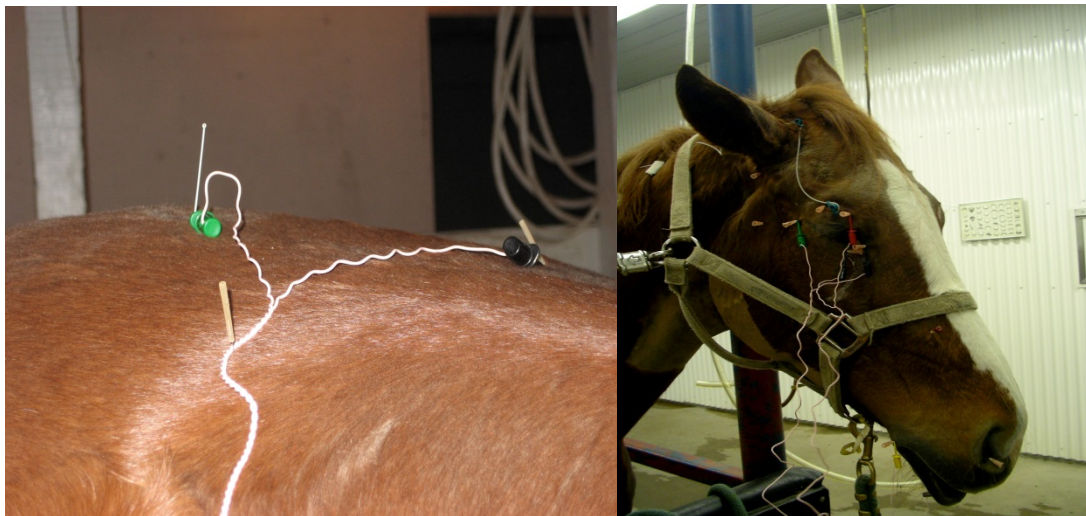
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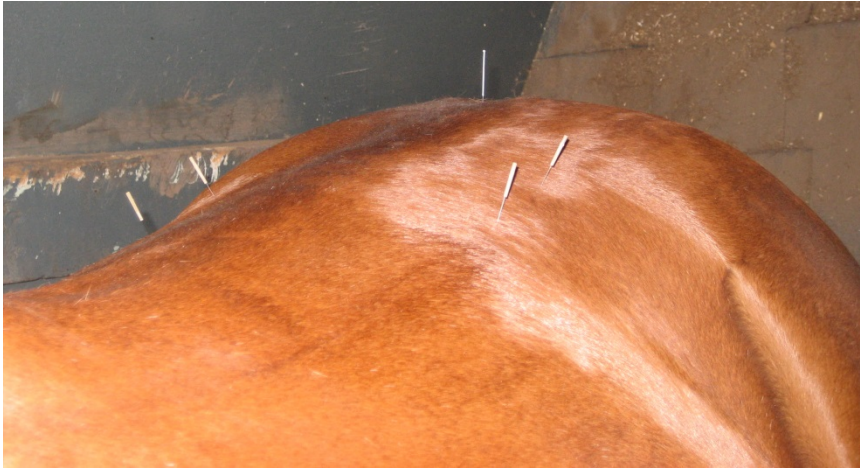
through the body. A form of energy flows through each of the meridians. Each meridian has its own individual characteristics. Acupuncture therapy helps to balance the flow of energy through the meridians and strengthens the physiological functions of the body. In doing so, pain and dysfunction is reduced and a more normal state is restored.

The most common area of the body that is affected with musculoskeletal pain in sport horses is the lumbar and sacro-pelvic muscles, fascia, tendons, and ligaments. These muscles and related structures are vital for a horse to propel itself into the air and clear a jump. Acupuncture therapy and trigger point therapy can be especially beneficial for horses with lower back and pelvic pain. Treatment points for lower back pain often involve several points located on the longest acupuncture meridian of the body. This meridian, called the bladder meridian, courses from the inside corner of the eye, down the top line of the body and terminates at the coronary band of the hoof near the outside heel. Certainly points on other meridians are also utilized to complement acupuncture areas on the bladder meridian, but the bladder meridian is a main highway of needle therapy for back and hind end pain.

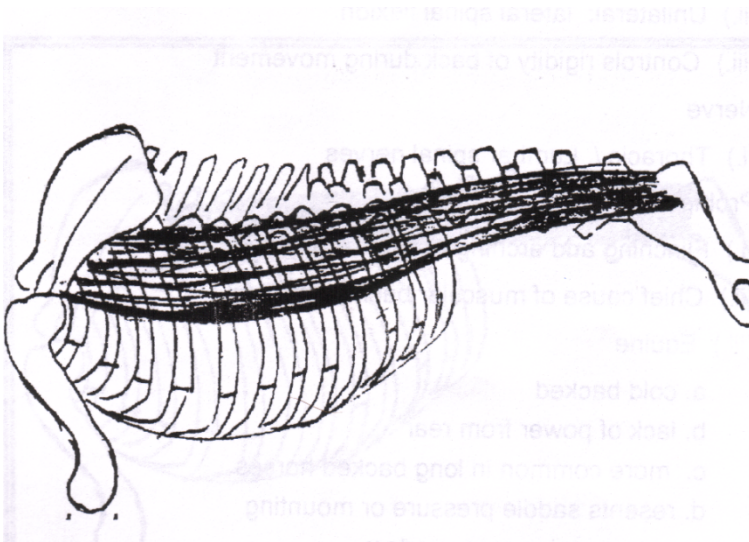


Electro acupuncture. Needles are stimulated with electricity.

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Dry Needling on meridians



Interconnection of muscle groups all along the back and pelvis

Hunters and Jumpers participate in a sport that requires them to have a very functional musculoskeletal system, if they are going to compete competitively. The entire body has an interdependent, connecting network of muscles and related structures that best function without stiffness and pain.

Physical therapies play an important role in keeping a competitive jumper comfortable so that it can compete at a high level. Physical maintenance is usually ongoing, as with any athlete. Acupuncture and chiropractic therapies are a beneficial adjunct to the other physical

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procedures when massage and related therapies are no longer effective enough to allow the horse to perform.