

**Intervertebral Disc Disease (IVD - IVDD)
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE**

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**Intervertebral Disc Disease in Dachshunds and other breeds -
Acupuncture, Homeopathy and Holistic Medicine give hope**

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Imagine the day when you are sitting watching television and there is suddenly a scream from the sofa. Your dachshund companion was just adjusting her position to make herself comfortable and suddenly she is in a great deal of pain and hardly able to move. She has prolapsed a disc in her spine and the injury and pressure to the nerves in the area and to the spinal cord is causing her extreme pain. You pick her up and put her on the floor and she stands and screams as you move her. She shivers with back arched and hind quarters swaying. Within an hour she is off her back legs completely and can only move by dragging herself by the front end. The bubbly active outgoing little dog is now a shadow of her former self and may even be in difficulties with bowel and bladder.

This alarming, painful and disabling condition is often treated by steroids and surgery these days, with mixed success. The steroids counter the pain and the damaging spinal cord oedema which results from the injury, while surgery, if carried out promptly, is carried out in the hope of relieving the pressure on the precious spinal cord, but not without great risk.

Let us look at the aetiology and pathology of this very distressing disease.

The spinal column consists of a number of bony vertebrae, the building blocks of the 'axial' skeleton.

The spinal cord, with all its important nerve trunks, runs through the vertebral canal. Placed neatly between the bodies of the vertebrae are the intervertebral discs, which provide mobility and cushioning to the joints in the spine.

Degenerative disease of the spine can cause calcification or weakening of those vital discs. The former results in the reduction of mobility and shows on X-ray

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pictures as a denser tissue between the vertebrae. Weakening can result in spontaneous rupture of the *dorsal* aspect of the discs (i.e. no external injury is required). Because they always rupture dorsally, the squirting out of the pulpy contents of the disc hits the spinal cord and concusses it. The response in this fragile and vital tissue is to swell in a confined space (the bony spinal canal), giving rise to pressure. We therefore have damage to nerves from concussive injury and subsequent severe pressure from oedema. Prompt treatment to relieve this oedema is important, whether by [Homeopathy](#) (which is very effective) or conventional drugs such as a single dose of short acting steroids (where no skilled veterinary homeopathic help is available). When this phase is controlled, it is not a pressure lesion any more, since the pulp will disperse up and down the canal, but healing of the concussive injury is still needed.

It is in this phase that [Acupuncture](#) has proven to be so valuable. There was a paper written many years ago, recording the valuable survey work done by Luc Janssens in Belgium. He showed, with proper statistical support for his findings, how Acupuncture was the most effective therapy for healing the after-effects of spinal cord injury.

It is worth taking a look at veterinary acupuncture at this point.

Veterinary Acupuncture is based on the ancient Chinese art of Acupuncture in humans, which started to evolve anything up to 4,000 years ago. It is part of Traditional Chinese Medicine which also includes Chinese Herbal Medicine and Moxibustion.

Acupuncture treats the animal as an 'energetic whole' rather than as a body presenting with a specific disease. As such it constitutes much more than a method of pain relief, being rather a system of internal medicine in its own right.

Disease is considered to be a result of disordered energy flow in the body. The normal energy patterns were charted in China several thousand years ago, as coursing through the Meridians or channels, of which there are fourteen major ones. Health depends upon the regular rhythmic flow of energy within these channels and upon the balance between Yin and Yang, 'the eternal opposites'. When the energy flow or balance is interrupted, disturbed or wrongly distributed, symptoms of disease are seen. Cure of this disease situation depends on rebalancing the disturbance and this is done by the stimulation of precisely identified points on the body surface. These are stimulated by a variety of needles or by finger massage, by heat ([Moxibustion](#)), by [LASER](#), by electrical currents or by implant or injection.

The mechanisms involved in the workings of Acupuncture, based as it is on Oriental philosophy, are obscure to Western minds, which are often confined by

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linear and reductionist thinking. Each living creature is thought to be endowed at birth with life energy (Qi or chi). This energy is used up by the body in the business of living and is replenished by eating and breathing. Imbalance in the flow of this energy through the meridians is caused by internal or external factors (pernicious influences) and is the fundamental process of disease. The acupuncturist will attempt to correct this imbalance by stimulation of specific points, often far removed from the site of apparent trouble, since points are found, relating to various organs and functions, over the whole body.

The Chinese evolved the principles of Acupuncture by careful observation of the patient in illness and in health, by pulse diagnosis and by observation of related 'active' points. They also learned to relate impaired body function to external and internal pernicious influences, including the emotions and diet. Their treatment consisted of eliminating the consequences of these influences and rebalancing the body either using the points on related meridians or in areas of local pain.

The primary purpose of Acupuncture treatment is to stimulate the body's own healing powers and its own ability to maintain the equilibrium of its internal environment. The Acupuncturist is therefore less concerned with the specific 'scientific' name of the disease, from which the animal is suffering, than he is with the nature of the energy imbalance caused and the causative factors.

Diseases which respond are not merely painful conditions such as lameness or back problems but also many serious or non-serious internal diseases. Success depends upon the body's stimulated ability to heal, and therefore whether or not mechanisms exist within the body which, if appropriately stimulated, can resolve the problem. There are therefore many spectacular successes, some major disappointments and a proportion of cases in which palliation or temporary relief only is achieved.

Treatment is generally **non painful**; some sensation, transitional between pain and pleasure, is felt by humans at the site of needling. There is often a relaxing effect during treatment and an immense sleepiness for 24 hours following treatment. Treatment lasts for varying periods from 5 - 30 minutes usually, generally averaging at 15 - 20 minutes. We usually repeat the treatment at between two to fourteen day intervals and, if no response is seen after three or four such treatments, the likelihood of a positive response is much reduced.

Let us return to the specific treatment of disc prolapse. We have certainly found out that work with Acupuncture in our practice has borne out the results of Luc Janssens. Animals caught early in the attack have an extremely good chance of full recovery or recovery to a stage which is tantamount to complete recovery. They become pain-free and fully mobile. Animals presented at a later stage, still paralysed, have a slightly lesser chance. Animals which have undergone the spinal

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surgery mentioned previously, and in whom the surgery has not succeeded, have a much poorer chance of recovery when we look back over a large number of cases. Surgery is really only a valid option in the very early stages (the first twenty-four to forty-eight hours) of the attack and is not such an attractive option if skilled acupuncture is available.

Acupuncture needles can be inserted at the site of injury and elsewhere in the body, particularly in the neck and hind legs. This needling appears to be able to stimulate a rebalancing of energy patterns in the body, providing for accelerated and more effective healing. It also provides very valuable pain relief. We support this with homeopathic treatment to help in pain relief and healing, such as *Hypericum* and *Nux vomica*, which latter helps to relieve the very painful muscle spasms in the area and the resultant constipation and urine retention, so often a feature of the disease. [Herbs](#) can also provide great pain relief and resolution of injury. Medicines such as *Comfrey*, *Willow bark* and *Devil's Claw* are of great benefit. Finally, [Aromatherapy](#) may also be used to good effect; an example of one very valuable oil is *Lavender*, to aid in relaxation of tension and spasm. Many cases also require sensitive and careful [Chiropractic](#) help. These can all act in very valuable support of the vital Acupuncture therapy.

Those readers with Dachshunds (who are known for this problem but many other breeds of small dog can be affected), will want to know what they can do to *prevent* the disease. These dogs have very active personalities and confinement, in order to protect them, is not really an option. However, a [natural diet](#) from puppyhood is a very good insurance policy for strong and healthy intervertebral disc tissue. By this is meant avoidance of manufactured food, with all its risks of additives, processing, possibly unsuitable sources of ingredients etc. More control is needed of our dog's diets and we should prepare these fresh, from known quality ingredients, preferably organic, in order to avoid as many of the chemicals as possible. This is the basis of health and can be the subject of a complete article in its own right. Homeopathic *Calcarea fluorica* is an excellent remedy to give, on a preventive basis, throughout the growth period and on an occasional basis throughout adulthood, in order to provide for and to maintain healthy musculoskeletal tissues. It can be given in the 6th centesimal or even 6th decimal potency, twice weekly when bone growth is rapid, then perhaps once or twice monthly when the skeleton has grown. However, medicine is nothing without a proper healthy and natural diet and holistic medical practice down the centuries has always recognised this. Our modern trend for convenience foods for our dogs is not to be recommended.

Christopher Day – October 2000

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