Oh, the aches and pains! Sometimes our dogs can overdo it with exercise and feel joint and muscle pain for a day or two afterward. Other times, the discomfort is chronic and deeper, like arthritis or degenerative joint disease, and needs ongoing support.

In either case, acupressure can successfully reduce pain and inflammation, and increase range of motion. Acupressure is safe to use, easy to learn and can be used alone or as a complement to other modalities. Most dogs tolerate acupressure well and appreciate the help you can give them at home or in between acupuncture or massage therapy appointments. Acupressure may also help reduce the amount of pain medications needed to keep your dog comfy and happy, which is much better for their wellness in the long run.

**Getting to the point**

Acupressure is the practice of applying gentle pressure to particular points around the body to help move chi or life force. Chi is life promoting energy that’s constantly flowing in the body, along its pathways or meridians. It’s when chi is disrupted along these meridians that disease, pain, and illness set in.

When it comes to muscle pain and joint fatigue, science agrees that stimulating the release of endorphins through acupressure relieves pain and inflammation. Finding these areas, called acupoints, can be as easy as identifying warm spots, raised or sunken spots, or tender spots on your dog’s body. These points tend to be located where nerves enter a muscle, the midpoint of the muscle, or where the muscle joins with the bone. Generally, the points are bilateral, meaning there’s a matching point on both sides of the body. You don’t need to know the name of a point you’ve found in order to do some good.

**It’s all in the fingers**

Acupressure techniques can include light pressure initiated with the fatty tip of your thumb, circular rotation, gentle pulsing, back and forth motion, or even light scratching.

When using the thumb-pressure method, make sure you are holding your thumb between 45 and 90 degrees to the dog’s body or limb. You should also make sure your fingernail doesn’t push into your dog, causing pain.
Start out by easing direct pressure (about one quarter to one half pound) into the point and holding it, keeping your other hand placed on the dog’s body. This allows you to be more aware of his body reactions. Watch and wait for a release or reaction from your dog, indicating that the stagnated energy has moved. A sigh, licking the lips, yawning, stretching, licking your hand, or even passing gas can be an indication that you’ve moved some energy in his body. It may be a few seconds or up to a minute or two. Sense your pet’s reaction. He may prefer gentle circles or light scratching over the area. If he pulls away or reacts negatively, release the pressure and try again, a bit more gently. If your dog seems uncomfortable or uninterested, let him be and try again another time.

**Too much of a good thing**

It takes 24 hours for chi to flow throughout the body. During this time, observe carefully for any reaction your dog may have had to your session. In acute situations, checking your dog’s body every 24 hours for acupoints may be needed. For chronic issues, every few days may be enough to keep him in balance and comfortable. Sometimes more isn’t better. Identify a few points to work on your dog, then give his body time to show you where to go next.

**First thing’s first**

Acupressure differs from trigger point therapy because it works on blocked or congested energy centers or meridians. As with any energy-based work, settling your own self is very important before you place your hands on your dog. Choose a time when both you and your dog are comfortable and quiet. Let the stress of the day fall away for this period of time. Take a few deep breaths, and focus your thoughts on helping your dog feel well, peaceful, and without pain. Warm your hands by rubbing the palms together and feel your own energy becoming calm.

**Acupressure Points for Comfort**

There are a few specific points that energetically match up nicely to orthopedic discomfort. Keep in mind, when searching for an acupoint to stimulate, feeling for hot or cold, tender, protruding or sunken spots along his body is helpful. You don’t want to cause any undue pain for your dog. If you find a painful point, be very careful and respect your dog’s reaction when he prefers you leave that spot alone.

**Yang Tomb Spring or GB 34** is effective for any muscle, tendon, or knee issue. It’s especially helpful with stiffness. Yang Tomb Spring is located on the outside of each hind leg just below the knee joint at the head of the small leg bone (tibia). Try a gentle circular motion on this point. Remember to do both legs.

**Bai Hui** helps to strengthen the hind end and can calm anxiety that often accompanies pain. It’s located along the spine at the lumbosacral junction, just in front of the pelvis. Try using a gentle, rhythmic scratching or back and forth motion. There is only one Bai Hui point.

**Aspirin Point or BL60** is a pain reliever and relaxes muscles. It’s located in the depression at the base of the Achilles tendon, between the tendon and anklebone, in the skinny part of hock on the outside of the leg.

On the opposite side of this point is the **Great Creek or Ki3**. It strengthens the kidneys, which are instrumental in bone health.

Try a gentle pinching action, and hold these points together for about 15 to 30 seconds. Remember to stimulate these points on both hind legs.

**Stationary Seam or GB29 and GB30** used together are good for back and hip pain, as well as paralysis of the leg. Find the hipbone while your dog is lying on his side. Gently lift the leg, supporting the knee, and find the hip joint where the top of the leg joins the pelvis. The points lie in a depression in front of and behind the hip socket. If your dog is in pain, practice finding the location on another dog first. Remember to do both sides of the body.

**Adjoining Valleys or LI4** is helpful for reducing pain in the shoulder, elbow, and wrist. It’s located on the front leg in the web of the dewclaw. If your dog’s dewclaws have been removed, the point is at the scar. Gently massage between the dewclaw and the paw with a back and forth motion. Remember to stimulate this point on both front paws.

**The Acupressure Points**

**Shoulder Seam or TH14** is a point to use for a painful shoulder. It’s located at the shoulder joint in a depression just behind the major tendon, behind the acromion process. Remember to stimulate this point on both sides of the body.

Before you finish the acupressure session with your dog, gently massage along both sides of the spine for 30 seconds. Then offer a gentle, sweeping motion over his body, as if you are brushing away dandruff, to gently connect his body’s energies. Try to keep him quiet for a little while afterward.

End your acupressure session with a kiss on his head and gratitude in your heart knowing you’re able to help him feel his very best. These simple points, combined with your healing intent are wonderful complements to any other means you use to keep your dog pain-free.

Brenda Utzerath is nationally board certified in small animal acupressure and has a practice in Beaver Dam, WI. She uses natural healing methods to encourage wellness and uplift quality of life in companion animals. Visit her website at moderndog.abmp.com