

Natural Dog Success Story: Good Flash Back

Acupuncture and orthopedic therapy get Dalmatian back on his feet.

Denise Flaim

The dog: Flash, an 8-year-old Dalmatian.

The problem: A slipped disc at the base of Flash's neck left him in too much pain to move. The once-feisty Dalmatian screamed if anyone touched him, and he had stopped eating. "We had to pick him up and carry him to the yard. He couldn't stand on his legs at all," says owner Reba Bragg.

The conventional approach: Slipped or ruptured discs are often treated with steroids and diuretic medications such as furosemide, which temporarily relieves the swelling and pressure on the spinal cord and nerves.

If that fails, the next step is sometimes surgery to remove any disc material that is pressing on the spinal cord. Although such operations on the lower back are routine, the base of the neck, where Flash's disc was located, "is a very difficult area to work on," says Jody Kincaid, DVM, a holistic vet who was Flash's last hope.

The holistic approach: Kincaid's long-range plan was to get Flash on a regimen of organic whole-food concentrates that could help rebuild his body. "Nutritional therapy is so important because many times back issues are a manifestation of malnutrition on a subclinical, or low, level," he says. Among the supplements Kincaid prescribed for Flash were two Standard Process products that contain extracts of animal organs and glandular tissues to strengthen parallel systems in the body: Ligaplex II for connective tissue and joints and Neuroplex for nervous system and endocrine function.

But the first order of business was relieving Flash's intense pain. To that end, Kincaid turned to veterinary orthopedic manipulation, or VOM, a hybrid of chiropractic that uses a handheld device called an activator to detect and relieve misalignments in the spine.

He also used moxibustion, an ancient form of heat therapy that incorporates the herb *Artemisia vulgaris*, or mugwort, into an acupuncture treatment.

"The Chinese figured out that when moxa [Chinese for mugwort] is burned, there is something in that emanation that is in harmony with the body's energy field," Kincaid explains. "The body can absorb it and use it to boost chi," the energy that courses through the body. According to Chinese medicine, disease results when chi is stagnant or weak.

When used on people, a moxa pellet, which smolders similarly to incense, is placed on an acupuncture point. The tiny cone is allowed to burn down until it gets hot, then is flicked off. Animals require indirect moxibustion, in which a needle is inserted into the acupuncture point, then a stick of smoldering moxa is used to heat it for a minute or two.

The result: Flash improved immediately after his first treatment, regaining his ability to walk. In fact, he may have felt too good, too soon: Overexerting himself, he reinjured his neck.

"It took several treatments and several weeks, but now he's running around like nothing ever happened," Bragg says. Although Flash is sometimes a little unsteady when he tries to scramble to his feet in a hurry, he's now living up to his name — a far cry from the immobile dog who Bragg feared might never walk again.

Caveats: Not all veterinary acupuncturists are trained in moxibustion. The herb has a smell that some dogs may dislike, and care must be taken not to inadvertently burn a canine patient during treatment.

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