

The Use of Electroacupuncture to Treat Headshaking Caused by Trigeminal Neuralgia in Horses

Some success has been demonstrated using percutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (PENS) to treat trigeminal-mediated headshaking (TMHS) in horses. The aim of this study was to determine whether electroacupuncture (EA) could provide similar remission from the pain of this debilitating condition. EA is less invasive than PENS and can be carried out in the stable yard without the need for a hospital setting and expensive equipment. Six horses and ponies showing clinical signs of TMHS were treated with electroacupuncture of the infraorbital nerve under light sedation. The nerve was stimulated with alternating 2 and 80 Hz frequencies for a period of 25 min with the current adjusted so that there was visible twitching of the nostrils and/or lips. Follow-up treatments were given when the signs recurred or 4–7 days later if there was no initial response. The procedure was well tolerated by all the horses. Once a response was achieved, the period of remission often increased with subsequent treatments.

Median remission time for the first treatment was 5.5 days (mean 7.6 days, range 0–13 days, n = 6), second treatment 8.5 days (mean 10.6 days, range 7–21 days, n = 6), third treatment 18 days (mean 28.8 days, range 6–71 days, n = 6), fourth treatment 47.5 days (mean 10 weeks, range 11 days–23 weeks, n = 6), fifth treatment 13 weeks 5 days (mean 18 weeks 5 days, range 5 weeks–46 weeks, n = 5), sixth treatment 24 days (mean 26 days, range 13–41 days, n = 3). The three horses that started treatment in 2015 (horses 1–3) received a single treatment in April or May of 2016 and were still asymptomatic at the end of the study period in October 2016. Horses 2 and 3 remain asymptomatic to date and horse 1, which had been seasonally affected and unrideable for 3 years prior to the study now requires just a single treatment each spring. It was concluded that EA of the infraorbital nerve is an effective and well-tolerated treatment for the management of horses considered to be experiencing trigeminal-mediated headshaking.