

Acupuncture and Physiotherapy as a Multimodal Approach to Myofascial Pain Syndrome in Cats.

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Myofascial pain syndrome (MPS) is a common clinical finding related to myofascial trigger points (MTrPs) presenting with musculoskeletal pain in both humans and animals. In a recent review addressing treatment and management of myofascial pain syndrome, Galasso et al. (2020) observed that MPS is frequently presented as a chronic condition affecting up to 85% of the human population. In veterinary practice, Janssens (1991) introduced the concept of MPS and MTrPs, identifying and describing trigger points in 48 dogs presenting chronic lameness. Authors observed that, like in humans, MTrPs are considered to cause pain in animals and can be comparable to human findings.

The studies conducted on dogs and horses have shown clinical applicability, despite the limited number of subjects included in the studies. However, the reported observations provide evidence that, veterinary professionals, should consider myofascial trigger point as source of pain when assessing a horse and a dog. Unfortunately the state of the art shows a lack of studies investigating the feline species. Recent research observed that cats suffering from chronic pain show clinical signs like muscle spasms or skin twitching (Monteiro & Steagall, 2019), indicating that studies are needed to investigate clinical findings of myofascial trigger points also in feline patients as a possible cause of chronic musculoskeletal pain.

Acupuncture is considered an effective form of treatment for MPS, and the efficacy of some acupuncture techniques have been evaluated in several systematic reviews showing relieved pain and increased range of motion in humans. Xiuxia et al. (2017) have observed that acupuncture combined with other therapies is effective in decreasing pain and improving physical function in humans.

The present work is aimed at describing the observations, clinical responses, advantages, and disadvantages of using acupuncture combined with physiotherapy in cats suffering from chronic pain recognized as Myofascial Pain. The cats included in this work are all patients referred by veterinarians for complementary treatment in support of arthritis. Most of the cats presented for arthritis had in common signs of general reduced mobility, reduced range of motion, decreased everyday activities and changes in behavior. Commonly, several trigger points were observed along the thoracolumbar area and other anatomical district, while signs of lameness were observed only occasionally. In agreement with the referring veterinarians, the diagnosis of myofascial pain was added to the main diagnosis of osteoarthritis and considered the main source of pain for most of the feline patients observed and treated.

The cats were treated with acupuncture combined with manual and instrumental physiotherapy sessions, once a week for 10 weeks, followed by regular follow up until an adequate and personalized maintenance program has been achieved. All the cats included in this work have reached a satisfying improvement of their quality of life, according to both owner and referring veterinarians, as well as a lesser grade in the pain scale. Commonly, most of the cats have achieved better range of motion of the affected joints and improvement in the behavior. The limit of this work has been related to the difficulties in finding exercises interesting enough for a cat and in some cases the physical containment of the patient. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge regarding the biomechanics of the myofascia and myofascial trigger points in cats may have limited further success of the treatments. More investigations about MTrPs and MPS in the veterinary field in general, and in the feline patient in particular, might help developing efficient management strategies and prevention to reduce pain and musculoskeletal function.