





5/20/2018 Pet acupuncture more popular as practice becomes more mainstream. The Washington Post  
Ingegno also treats rabbits, including Tinkerbell, who is a sanctuary rabbit at the [House Rabbit Society of Maryland](#), D.C. and Northern Virginia.

Tinkerbell had an infection that caused what's known as head tilt, said Kathleen Wilsbach, chapter manager of the House Rabbit Society.

"It didn't cure her, totally," Wilsbach said. "But now she holds her head much higher and she's a lot more mobile. So it improved her quality of life."

Veterinarian Toni Connell of the Independent Hill Veterinary Clinic in Manassas has been a veterinarian since 1979. In 2004, she invested the 160 hours needed in Virginia to earn a license in veterinary acupuncture. It's akin to a dentist learning to give Botox injections, a skill that can bring in a healthy wave of business.

"It's been very helpful for treating cats with chronic upper respiratory diseases, and we just don't have anything in traditional medicine that works for them," she said.

Pet acupuncture, of course, attracts its share of skeptics.

IVAS's Weber thinks that animals should be treated only by veterinarians who are trained in acupuncture.

"Human acupuncturists are trained to treat humans," Weber said. "A vet is much more qualified to treat an animal and has much more training."

And of course, some critics say acupuncture is an unproven treatment, for both pets and humans.

"There's actually no logical reason to believe that sticking needles into any human or animal can have the slightest influence on any disease and make hormones or antibodies behave differently," said Stephen Barrett, a retired psychiatrist who runs "Quackwatch," a Web site that questions the scientific value of and research on everything from aromatherapy to St. John's wort. "The most that can be hoped for is acupuncture can distract people and relieve some pain, but there's not real evidence that this has practical value. And there's just not enough studies on animal acupuncture, and why would there be?"

The American Medical Association takes no specific position on acupuncture, but says that "there is little evidence to confirm the safety or efficacy of most alternative therapies." It says more "stringently controlled research should be done" to determine whether it is useful.

But Schoell and others who have used the treatment for their pets say they are convinced.

On a recent Wednesday morning, McVey walked Cashew and Schoell into her backyard garden. Cashew chased a bug through the tulips as the wind chimes jingled. "It helps you relax, being outside, right?" McVey said. Schoell talked about how Cashew might have been lost or abandoned before being adopted, causing him to suffer rattled nerves.

So they walked Cashew down into McVey's salmon-colored basement, where she examined his coat and took his pulse. This was Cashew's third session; the dog is also seeing a trainer, and Schoell believes the combination has helped calm his fears.

Then McVey began. As the dog rested on her carpet, she gently stuck thin, light needles about the diameter of a whisker into points on his chest and back. Cashew didn't seem bothered by the needles at all — he started to look drowsy, as if he was about to segue into a nap.

“You can see his eyes soften and his ears lower down where as before he was holding everything at attention like he had his armor on,” said McVey.

The entire process lasted about 30 minutes. Then back to the garden. Cashew seemed as relaxed as a person would be after a massage. McVey bent down to pet his belly.

“Okay, boy, off you go into this beautiful day.”

 **60 Comments**

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