



by Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis

Time to get going on the basics; spring training is here and now.

The impulse is just to get on your horse and ride off in all directions, enjoying the good weather and all the energy your horse has. As much fun as that would be, it isn't a good idea. To avoid early season injuries it is wise to take it slow while building strength, flexibility, and endurance. Your horse will appreciate it.

Consistent conditioning with acupressure sessions integrated into your training program will enhance your horse's well-being considerably. Take time to write down a training schedule for you and your horse. Thoughtful planning will give you the best results so that you both can enjoy a full season of riding, no matter what your discipline. Providing an acupressure session both before and after a training session ensures that the horse's tendons, ligaments, muscles, joints, and bones are receiving the nourishment they need to perform without injury.

Plan for Acupressure

While preparing a training program, include time for acupressure. **Before** exercising your horse, offer a brief acupressure session as part of his grooming. There are specific acupressure points that can be used to support the horse's body tissues, bringing a free flow of *Chi* (pronounced "chee", also seen as *Qi*), life-promoting energy, and Blood (nutrient-rich body fluids) to them. There are acupressure points that can be applied **after** exercise that can help your horse's body remove any toxins that could build-up in the muscles and joints during a training session.

Combining these acupressure points with a carefully planned conditioning program offers you and your horse a positive bonding experience as well as a good shot at a painless, injury-free spring.

Acupressure is based on the theories and principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The focus of TCM is to prevent imbalances of the flow of Chi and Blood throughout the horse's body. When an imbalance does occur and Chi and Blood are obstructed in any manner, the body cannot carry out the internal tasks necessary for good performance. The horse becomes more susceptible to illness and damage to his body tissues.

Observe & Assess

One of the most important aspects of offering acupressure sessions is the assessment of the horse. Prior to selecting the acupressure points, also called "acupoints", it is important to observe your horse. Take the time to see how your horse is standing – is he weighting one foot more than another? Does he appear stiff? Perhaps he is not tracking well on the off-side hind? Is he refusing to change leads? Are his joints swollen or hot? Does he have muscle spasms before or after exercise? In other words, are there any indications of pain or lack of fluid movement?

Keen observation is necessary to provide your horse with what he needs. Knowing as much as you can about your horse's anatomy is helpful, too. Being aware that the horse is having more of a tendon issue as opposed to a joint issue could lead you to addressing the animal's discomfort more directly in an acupressure session. Listening to the percussive hoof beats on the ground for each gait is one indicator of the fluidity of his overall movement. Being able to interpret the indicators does take study and experience. Consult with your wholistic veterinarian when you are questioning any

indicators your horse is exhibiting.

It is up to you to observe your horse's movement, behavior, and spirit and then select acupoints that will benefit your animal most at any given time. Take the time to hone your skills of observation. You may want to seek training from experts in the field of equine healthcare, behavior, gait analysis, and performing TCM-based assessment. It takes a trained and experienced eye to effectively sort out equine movement problems.

Before and After Acupressure Sessions

Once you have observed your horse and felt for lumps, bumps, and heat on his body, determine which acupoints to use in a brief session before exercise. When the training session is over, observe and assess the horse again and then decide which acupoints are appropriate to "work" to increase Chi and Blood circulation during his rest time. The following acupoints are general points that address different body tissues: tendon-ligament concerns, muscle pain, joint movement, bone issues, or regions of the body.

Select only three or four acupoints per session. Remember to work on both sides of your horse since acupoints are bilateral. We recommend that you keep a complete record of your acupressure sessions along with your training schedule. This information can guide your efforts along the way to top performance.

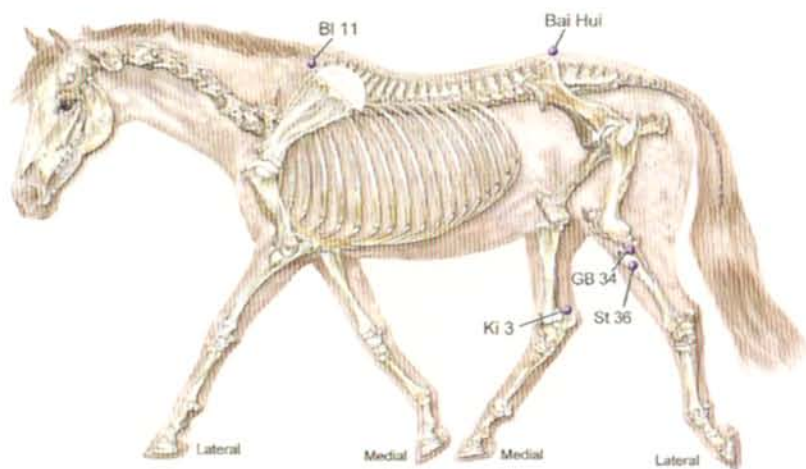
Gall Bladder 34 (GB 34), Yang Mound Spring – This point is commonly used to increase the strength and suppleness of tendons and ligaments. It also has a profound effect on the activities of the Liver organ system. The Liver, in TCM, regulates the amount of nourishing Blood that is directed to the appropriate areas of the body needed for muscle performance at any given moment. Because the Liver is responsible for Blood supply, it also functions to remove toxin build-up in the tissues post exercise.

Kidney 3 (Ki 3), Great Stream – Kidney 3 supports the original Chi and essence, or substance, of the horse's body. This point is known to benefit bones, muscle tissue, and regulate water metabolism and estrous cycles. It is used for arthritis, local swelling of the hock, lower back and pelvic limb problems or pain, and urinary issues.

Bai Hui Point, Heaven's Gate for the horse, is a classical point which can be stimulated to calm the horse's mind, enhance his sprit, and ensure the smooth flow of Chi and Blood to the hindquarters and lower back. It can be used for any hindquarter problem.

Stomach 36 (St 36), Leg Three Miles – There is a phrase in TCM, "When in doubt use Stomach 36." This point is used for an amazing number of conditions - anything from digestion, colic, richness of blood, allergies, anxiety, to a host of other conditions including low vital energy. It is an acupoint that can be included in

Conditioning With Acupressure



Point	Location
Bi 11	1.5 inches to the side of the midline, between the 3rd and 4th thoracic vertebrae. The point is just in front of the withers.
St 36	Located one finger width from the head of the fibula, on the lateral side of the tibia.
GB 34	Found at the interosseous (between 2 bones) space between the tibia and fibula.
Ki 3	Found in the skinniest part of the hock, inside of hind leg
Bai Hui	Located in the lumbosacral space.

every session just for good measure!

Bladder 11 (Bl 11), Great Shuttle – It is the Influential Point for Bones. This point strengthens bone, relaxes tendons/ ligaments and muscles, and benefits the joints. It is used to benefit any bone issues such as arthritis, joint deformity or dysfunction, and neck and spinal pain or stiffness.

There are numerous acupoints that could be used for particular issues; the ones given in this article are commonly used for pre- and post-exercise. Combining these acupressure points with a carefully planned conditioning program offers you and your horse a positive bonding experience as well as a good shot at a painless, injury-free spring. You'll be ready to get set and GO wherever your heart desires! ☺

About the authors:

Any Snow and Nancy Zidonis are the authors of *Equine Acupressure: A Working Manual*. They own Tallgrass Publishers, which offers Acupressure Books, DVDs, and Meridian Charts for horses, dogs, and cats. They founded Tallgrass Animal Acupressure Institute, which provides hands-on and online training courses worldwide including a Practitioner Certification Program.
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