

CANINE ANXIETY



TALLGRASS ANIMAL ACUPRESSURE RESOURCES



Amy Snow & Nancy Zidonis
www.animalacupressure.com

CANINE ANXIETY

A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES

By Amy Snow & Nancy Zidonis

Tallgrass Animal Acupressure Resources

Anxiety is painful for dogs. Acupressure, which is based on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is known to relieve the pain of anxiety. Every dog experiences anxiety, stress, and depression differently. The beauty of having Chinese medicine and acupressure at our fingertips is that we can address a dog's source of anxiety more directly. Plus, we can also suggest specific acupressure points, known as acupoints, to resolve specific stressful triggers.

The first article included in this series is "**What's Up with Separation Anxiety.**" This article will help you figure out why your dog is experiencing separation anxiety. Is your dog fearful, timid, or feeling defenseless? In Chinese medicine, each require a different approach in helping to relieve your dog's anxiety.



The second article, "**How Acupressure Can Help Anxious Dogs,**" discusses the nature of canine anxiety and offers a general acupressure session to reduce anxiety. This brief article is followed by an in-depth discussion of how dogs react to stressful situations. "**Stress is Stressful: Acupressure Can Help**" also covers how dogs respond to your level of stress. This article provides a photograph chart of the acupoints you can use to bring down your stress

level. When you are less stressed, you will be more effective in reducing you dog's anxiety level.

The last article included in this collection, "**Rebounding from Depression: Canine Acupressure,**" delves into resolving canine depression from a multi-modal approach. There are many facets of dealing with dogs who are depressed, and it helps to have a team on your side to bring your dog's vitality back.

Dogs just want to have fun. They want to play, be loved, and have a healthy fun-filled life. When their needs are not being met or they are placed in situations in which they can't cope they become anxious. By being in our lives, dogs experience a moderate level of stress and anxiety. When the stress level is excessive, it literally becomes painful, and dogs suffer. Between acupressure techniques, holistic veterinary care, and behavioral guidance we have the tools to support our beloved dogs health and well-being.

Point Work Techniques

While performing acupressure point work, always have both hands on the animal at the same time. One hand is doing point work while the other hand rests gently and comfortably somewhere on the dog's body. The resting hand can feel for any reactions the animal has to the point work, plus offering grounding and comfort.

There are two basic acupressure point techniques for stimulating acupoints: the Thumb Technique and the Two-Finger Technique. Both are considered direct pressure techniques, called *An Fa* in Chinese. There's no need to press down hard because the meridians and acupoints are just beneath the surface of the skin. In fact, gentler is better so you won't obstruct the flow of chi.



Direct Thumb Pressure: Place the soft tip of your thumb on an acupoint at about 45-degree angle to the dog's body. Press the acupoint gently but with intent and count to 20 slowly then move to the next point. The Thumb Technique works best to apply on the trunk and neck of the animal.

Two-Finger Technique: Place your middle finger on top of your index finger to create a little tent. Then lightly put the soft tip of your index finger on the acupoint and count to 20 slowly before moving on to the next acupoint indicated in the chart. This technique is good for point work on the lower extremities.

A dog experiencing anxiety will benefit from your touch and intention to help him feel more comfortable, build confidence, and be more trusting of you. While going through the articles and performing the acupressure point work, remember to stimulate the acupoints on both sides of your dog so that he will be able to restore the harmonious flow of *chi* and blood. By offering your animals consistent acupressure sessions, you will be helping to reduce his anxiety plus support his health and well-being.



What's Up with Separation Anxiety?

Separation anxiety plagues many canines because they are deeply pack-oriented. When you walk out the door, their food provider, protector, and source-of-comfort member of their pack has abandoned them. This can be tremendously upsetting and cause to act-out.

The interesting thing about separation anxiety is that different dogs act-out differently in response to the same stimuli of being left alone. All separation-anxiety responses are not the same. One dog's fear-anxiety may drive them to aggression. Another dog may not feel secure enough to be alone. And the next dog can't cope at all and destroys your couch or eats the door.

Separation anxiety is a painful experience for a dog. The severity of the pain varies. Canine behavior experts can work with you and your dog by employing a desensitization program. Your holistic veterinarian can offer calming herbs, essential oils, or mild drug therapies. In Chinese medicine we can complement other approaches while addressing more precisely why the dog is suffering from separation anxiety.

Chinese Medicine Approach

When a dog is experiencing separation anxiety he's reacting for a reason. It is up to us to figure out what that reason is so we can target the source and help resolve his painful reaction to his sense of abandonment. Rather than lump all separation into one bucket, in Chinese medicine we strive to identify the root of the anxiety. We want to understand which emotion is at play for each individual dog.

There are at least four different types of separation anxiety that stem from different internal organs in the dog's body. According to Chinese thought, each organ is associated with a particular emotion. The dog's behavior gives us a clue as to which organ is not in balance. Once we understand which organ it is, we can effectively address the root cause of his anxiety and provide an acupressure-massage session specifically for that animal. The intent is to balance the organ by reestablishing the harmonious and nourishing flow of energy.

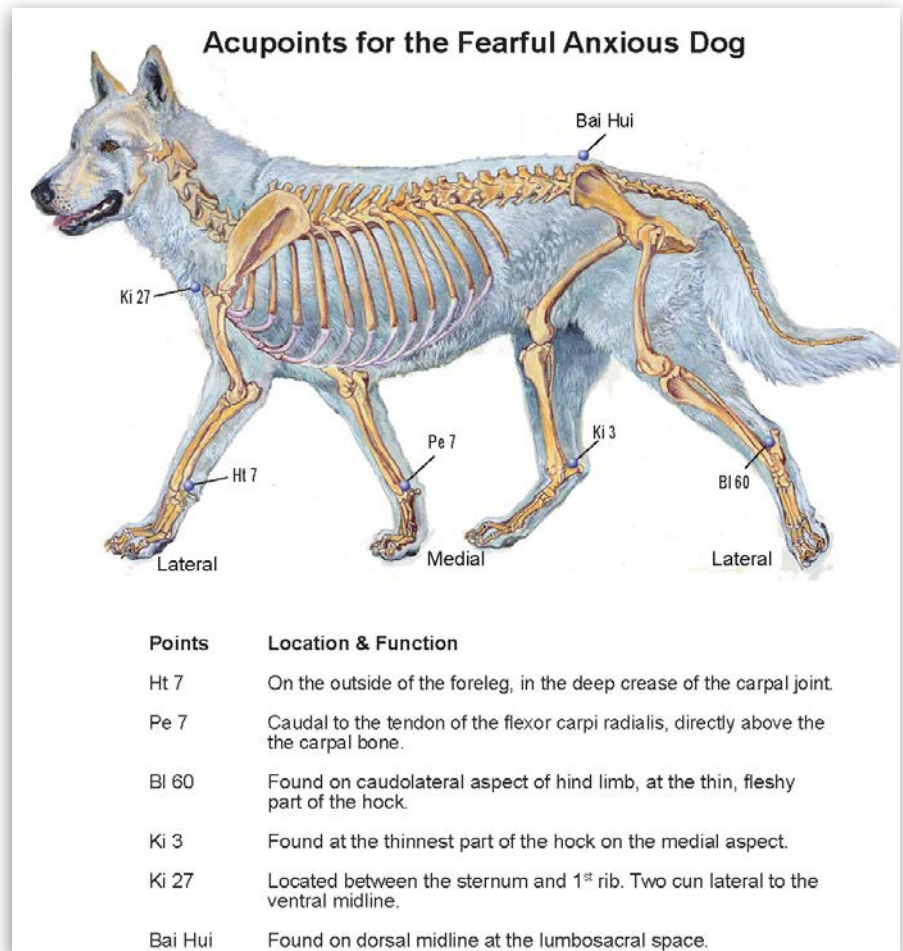
When we restore and establish an harmonious flow of chi, life-promoting energy, throughout the dog's body, the dog is relaxed and more able to cope with what he sees as a threatening situation. Let's look at how to distinguish between four different separation - anxiety experiences are based.

Fear – Based Separation Anxiety

The fear-based dog is extremely scared of being left by his guardian. He feels he has nothing to lose. His pain cuts so deeply into his core sense of existence that he is willing to die to relieve his pain.

Dogs are predatory in nature, and this animal can become aggressive to other members of the pack when left. Fear-based anxiety can lead to fear-aggression, which is dangerous. An integrated strategy is needed to help this poor dog.

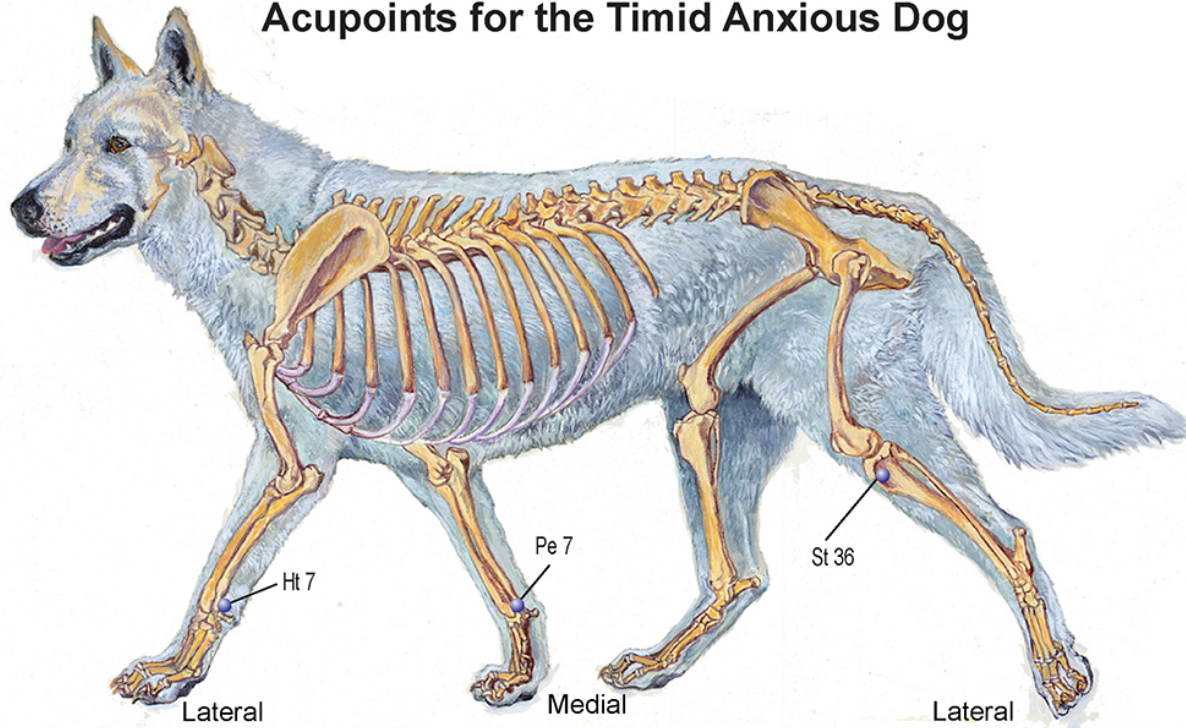
In Chinese medicine the Kidney is associated with fear. When it's safe to work with the dog, offering an acupressure session that focuses on calming and balancing Kidney energy will greatly reduce his level of fear. The more often you can offer the Fear-Based Anxiety Session, the better, especially initially.



Timidity – Based Separation Anxiety

The timid dog appears insecure; he cowers, his tail is tucked under him, and he wants to hide or run away. This behavior indicates that this dog does not feel he belongs on this earth. His sense of self is dependent on how and where he fits into the pack. When an important pack member leaves the house, this dog's anxiety level rises exponentially.

Acupoints for the Timid Anxious Dog

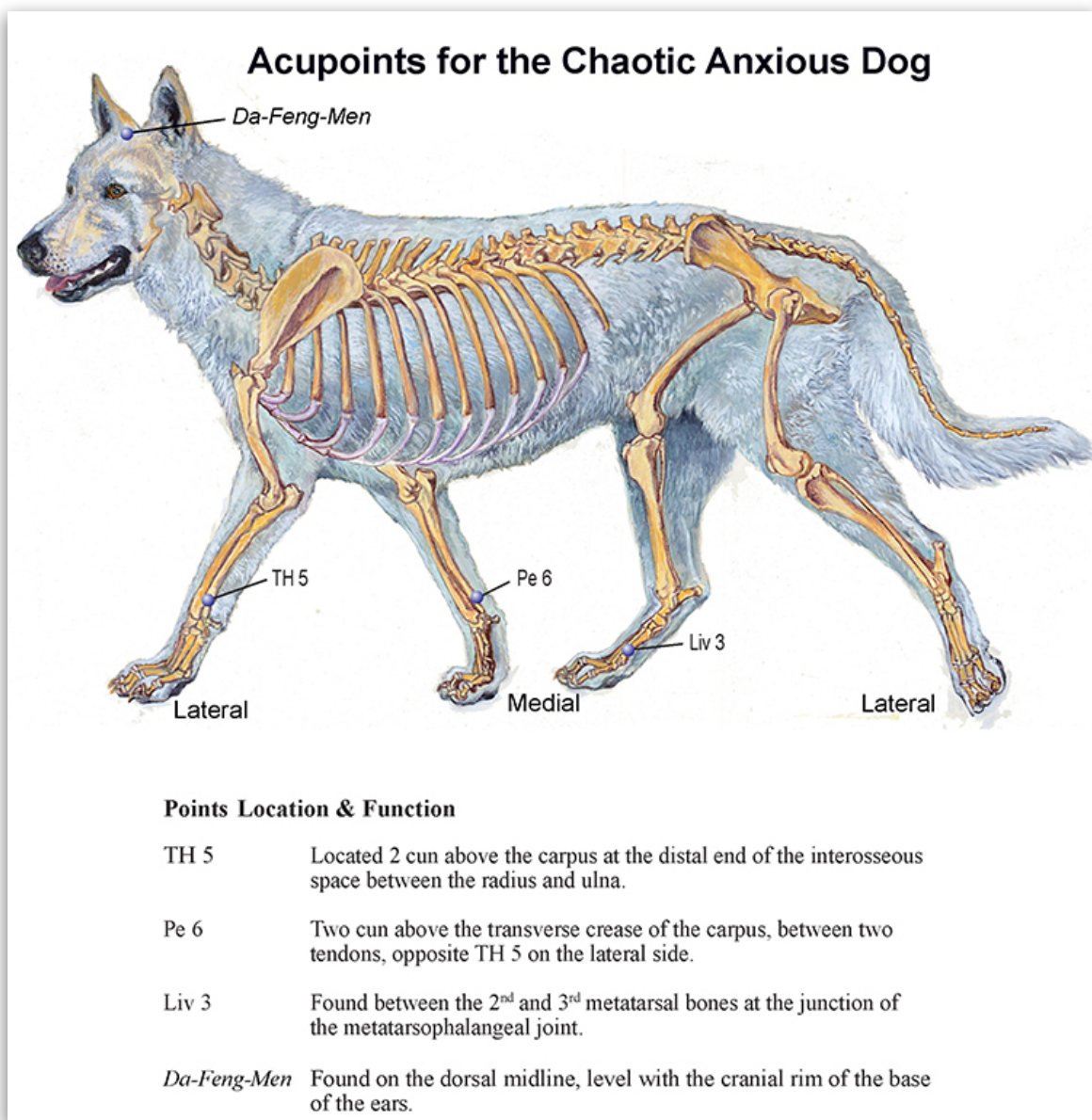


| Points | Location & Function |
|--------|--|
| St 36 | Located 3 cun below St 35, one finger-breadth lateral to the tibial crest, in the cranial tibial muscle. |
| Ht 7 | On the outside of the foreleg, in the deep crease of the carpal joint. |
| Pe 7 | Caudal to the tendon of the flexor carpi radialis, directly above the the carpal bone. |

When left to their own pain-relieving devices, the timid dog is apt to eat your favorite slippers or gnaw on your antique chair leg. According to Chinese pathology, using specific acupressure points and techniques known to balance Stomach and Spleen will help the dog with timid-base anxiety. The intent in offering this acupressure session is to help the dog feel more grounded and well-nourished, which, in turn, enhances his self-confidence. We want this dog to be able to be comfortable and confident on his own.

Emotionally Chaotic – Based Separation Anxiety

This is the dog that is experiencing emotional chaos and is unable to settle if his human is not present. His whole world is thrown into chaos when his special human disappears. He wanders around and can become irritable. Some dogs spin in circles, some have ticking reactions when they experience this type of generalized anxiety. We can look to the Liver to help reduce this dog's general stress level because the Liver is responsible for balancing all the emotions. An hour before you leave, offering an acupressure session can make a huge difference in how the generally anxious dog functions and feels once you are gone.

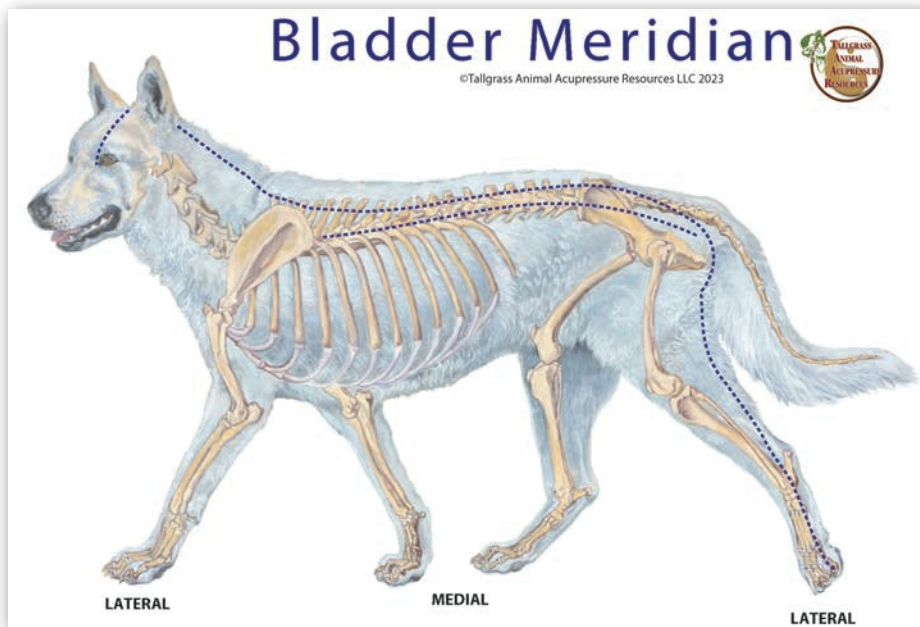


Defenselessness – Based Separation Anxiety

This is the dog that feels defenseless and needs your constant protection. A young puppy, an older dog, an injured or sick dog can feel very vulnerable when left alone. His anxiety increases when he feels threatened and does not have what it takes to fend for himself. Being in a pack is the only defense this dog thinks he has. His human will protect him from danger with which he does not feel equipped to deal.

There's a comforting Chinese massage technique you can use to support the defenseless dog. Place your hand flat down on the dog's neck and stroke down the

dog's back off the midline tracing along the Bladder meridian. Trace the Bladder meridian 3 times on each side of the dog. Go slowly but with clear intent and gentle firmness. This is very soothing and calming. Then finish with gently scratching the *Bai Hui* point on the midline of the dog's sacrum.



Separation anxiety is so painful for a dog and so agonizing for us to see as well. These dogs literally feel their survival is at stake when they are not part of a pack. Acupressure-massage combined with other supportive approaches can serve as a healthy life-line to manage and hopefully resolve your dog's anxiety.

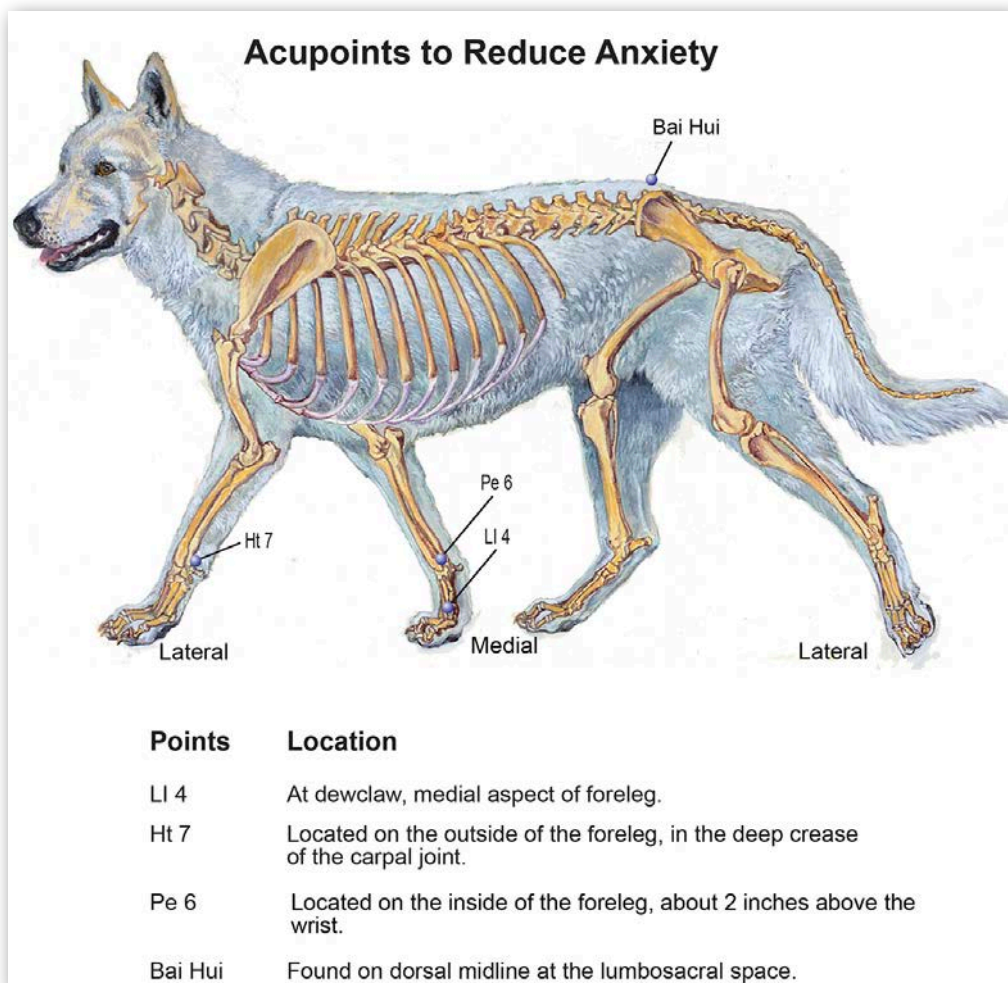


HOW ACUPRESSURE CAN HELP ANXIOUS DOGS

Anxiety is good and an appropriate response to a threat that could be life threatening. A dog needs to have a healthy sense of self-preservation. Problems arise when a dog becomes overly anxious. This can lead to being somewhat reactive and consistently apprehensive to even the mildest possibility of a threat. At this level of anxiety dogs often act out in unhealthy, quirky, and possibly repetitive behaviors.

Stress & Anxiety

When a dog's level of stress and anxiety reaches the next level, he tends to be reactive to everything from a new person coming in the house to the garbage truck in the back alley. The situation is much more severe and actually dangerous both for people and the dog himself. This kind of reactivity can lead to aggression where we have no idea what has triggered it. Excessive anxiety can result in the dog causing himself harm such as repetitively licking his foreleg until it is raw or chewing his own paw until it's bloody. This type of excessive anxiety no longer has anything to do with self-preservation.



Loss of Survival Instinct

The opposite is true, too. An equally inappropriate situation is when a dog is not at all anxious and lacks the basic survival instinct. A real threat could occur and the dog would be at the mercy of whatever it is. For instance a dog with a mean owner and the dog loses any sense of self preservation, that owner could kill his dog. A dog that is beaten into submission may not survive.

Acupressure Session To Balance Anxiety

Excess anxiety and a lack of anxiety are both unhealthy and unbalanced. By offering acupressure session, you can help the dog rebalance his energy and internal sense of self-preservation. There are acupressure points known to restore a healthy balance and both relieve anxiety by “re-setting” his survival instinct. Restoring balance is the key.



Stress is Stressful: Acupressure Can Help

If you are feeling stressed, your dog is too. Dogs pick up their emotional cues from their humans. We think we are hiding our feelings, but our animals have an uncanny sensitivity to us. When you are angry, doesn't your dog react by becoming amazingly passive? That's because he thinks he is calming you down by his being very calm. When you're happy and full of energy, your dog is bouncy and eager to enjoy your happiness. Well, when you are experiencing stress, your dog is feeling every bit as much as you.

Canine Stress Indicators

We are aware when our stress barometer is escalating. Dogs are even more "creative" about how they signal their stress. It's up to us to be conscious of what their signals are so we can help reduce their stress. There are mild canine indicators of stress and if not addressed immediately, the dog's physical and emotional stress can increase to scary heights.

Physical Stress Signals:

Mild physical stress signals can include increased yawning, shaking, licking lips, panting, scratching, and drooling. As the dog's stress level increases she might shed excessively, open his eyes unusually wide, cower, tremble, pace, tuck his tail between his legs or just wag the tip of his tail, pin his ears back or overly erect his ears, experience urinary incontinence, and gastrointestinal issues (e.g., diarrhea or constipation).

Physical signs that a dog is extremely stressed and can become dangerous to himself and others are tense body stance, raised hackles, puffed-out tail, lips stretched upward, teeth showing, menacing stare at dogs or humans before attacking, plus excessive licking or chewing on his own limbs.

Behavioral Stress Signals:

Behavioral changes of any type can indicate a dog is experiencing stress. Milder signals tend to be increased sleeping, clinginess, or periodic withdrawing. As the dog's feelings of stress continue to increase, he may hide, become agitated, evince decreased appetite, engage in destructive behaviors, and increase vocalization such as growling, barking, whining, or whimpering.

As a dog's stress escalates, his level of simple agitation can turn to outright aggression or an extreme fear response such as running away or completely shutting down emotionally. Though dogs are considered predatory by nature, when highly stressed

their “fight or flight” response comes into play. Different breeds react differently. For instance, Greyhounds may appear comatose when overwhelmingly stressed while the Akita Inu is more apt to become highly aggressive.

Given how stress is at best uncomfortable and at its extreme a life-threatening situation for us and our animals, how can we help ourselves and our beloved animals when dealing with stressful times?

Remedies for Stress

Behaviorists give us lots of good suggestions about how to contain canine stress. Recommendations often include establishing a routine, reducing stimulation, increasing exercise, working on focused training, creating a safe “cave-like” place, decreasing noise volume, instituting tasks, or having more playtime.

Turid Regaas, a well-respected canine behaviorist, suggests that we use what she calls “calming signals.” These signals are ones that dogs use themselves to calm other dogs and you, for that matter. Calming signals include licking the lips, yawning, looking away, arcing and not walking directly at the dog when approaching, becoming completely passive, and rolling over. You may not want to roll over, but using the other calming signals is doable. You will be responding to your dog in a language he understands.

Because your dog is taking most of his emotional cues from you, there’s something you can do to help remedy your own stress level while reducing your dog’s stress.

Acupressure for You!

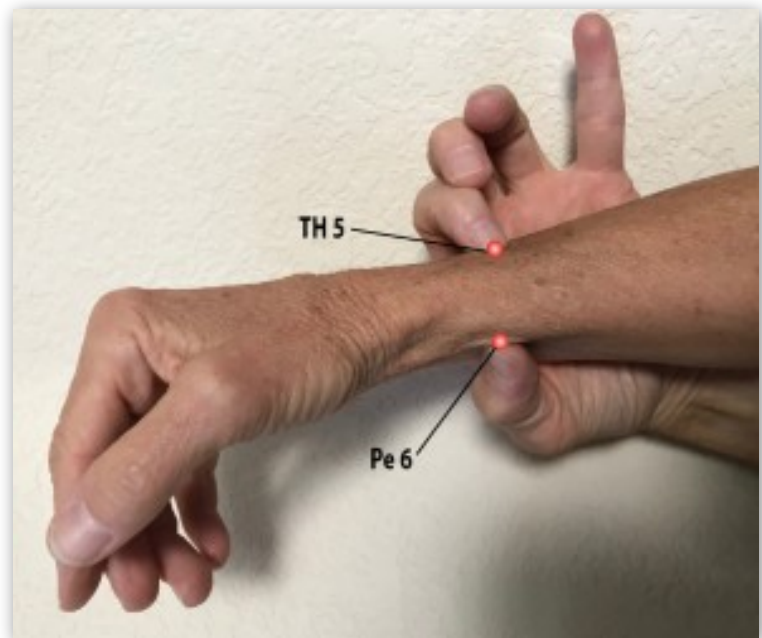
Bringing down stress begins with you. If you are feeling emotionally balanced, your dogs will be a lot happier and so will you. Acupressure is a simple and easy way to lower stress.

To begin de-stressing, find a comfortable, safe, intimate location for you and your dog. Relax by taking three deep breaths and exhaling slowly. Often a dog matches your breathing pattern and settles. While sitting with your dog, place your thumb lightly on the medial (under) side of your arm above your wrist and, simultaneously, place your middle finger gently on the opposite (lateral or top) side of your wrist as shown in the photograph below. Breathe naturally while holding these two acupressure points for a slow count to 20. Repeat this procedure on your opposite arm.

Pericardium 6 (Pe 6), Inner Gate – Located in the middle of the medial side of your forearm in the soft tissue between your tendons just beyond your wrist toward your elbow.

Triple Heater 5 (TH 5), Outer Gate – Located directly opposite Pe 6 on the lateral side of your forearm in the soft spot between the radius and ulna bones.

Now that you are feeling calmer, you are ready to offer your dog a brief acupressure session.



Acupressure for Your Dog!

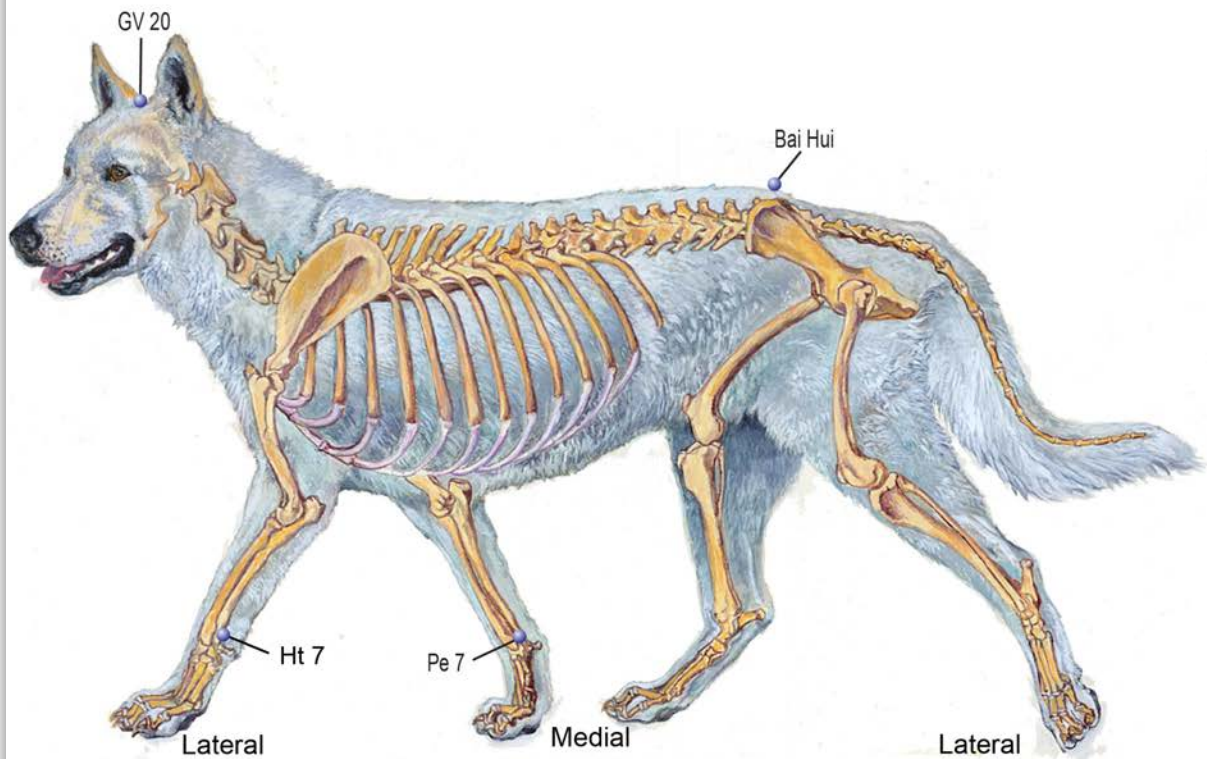
Shift your awareness to helping your dog cope with the inherent stress factors the dog is experiencing. Think about how much you want to share this acupressure session with



him. Begin by using the exact same acupressure points you just applied on yourself. See the photographs to the left. Gently hold the two acupoints on his forelimb at the same time and then repeat this procedure on his opposite forelimb when slowly counting to 20.

There are two more acupressure points, also called “acupoints,” that you can add to your dog’s session to enhance his relaxation and bring down his stress level.

Rebounding From Depression



| Points | Location |
|-------------|--|
| Ht 7 & Pe 7 | These acupoints are located above the wrist can be held at the same time using your thumb and forefinger. Ht 7 is located in the groove on the outside of the dog's leg above the wrist. Pe 7 is opposite Ht 7, on the inside of the leg. Stay on these two acupoints for a slow count to 30 then move on to the next point. |
| GV 20 | This acupoint is located on the top of the dog's head. Place your fingers at the front of the dog's ears and then draw them to middle of his skull, that's where GV 20 is located. Scratch the point for a slow count to 30. |
| Bai Hui | Most dogs love this point and want you to scratch it. The Bai Hui point is located on the dog's sacrum where there are no spinous processes sticking up – it feels like a flat space. Go for it, scratch that spot for as long as you and your dog want. |

The other two acupoints are the *An Shen* points located behind his ears (image below left) and the *Bai Hui* point (image below right) located in the center of his sacrum where there's a little flat spot.



These are classical canine acupoints known specifically to reduce stress and anxiety. Dogs like to scratch, so you are welcome to gently scratch these acupoints while counting to 20 slowly.



Offering your dog an acupressure session will help both of you to de-stress. Carving out your special time every day or two to share an acupressure session with your dog will add so much to your bonding experience.

REBOUNDED FROM DEPRESSION: Canine Acupressure

Jazz just isn't herself. Jazz is a 4-year-old Labrador-Standard Poodle mix with energy galore. Her guardians had to take her out for a vigorous run or have her dash around the dog park with her buddies at least twice a day to keep her from bouncing off the walls at home. Up until a month ago, Jazz lived to play with any dog or human who came her way.

Jazz' guardians are baffled. Where did their happy, athletic girl go? The jingle of her leash is met with little enthusiasm. She looks at them with this resigned look that says, "Okay, if you really must, I guess I'll get up and take you for a walk." A full food bowl used to be two exciting moments in her day, now she looks at it, takes a bite or two and goes back to her bed to sleep.

It's time to take Jazz to the holistic veterinarian for a check-up. The first step to figuring why Jazz' behavior has changed so radically in the past month is to make sure there are no physical health issues. A dog experiencing pain will decrease her activity. There are many underlying physical issues which can lead to Jazz' loss of zest for life.



Once a medical condition is ruled out, Jazz' guardian needs to think back to anything that may have happened a month or so ago when Jazz' behavior began to change. Oh my, that's when their son left for college. The first week after he left, Jazz looked for him all over the house and sat next to the door waiting for him to come home. As the days went on, she slept more and lost interest in playing, eating, and socializing. Jazz slowly slid into a deeper and deeper depression.

Canine Depression

Dogs experience depression much the way we do and for similar reasons. There are a host of reasons and the most common are loss of a companion animal or person, moving to a new house, change in the dog's schedule, loneliness, not getting as much attention when a newcomer arrives, a crisis occurs in the household, plus reacting to the guardian's depression. Other canine depression triggers include abuse, neglect, pain, aging, and even seasonal change.

The most common indicators of canine depression are excessive sleeping, minimal or no interest in play or exercise, either loss of appetite or overeating, generally low energy level, withdrawn, tucked tail, dull eyes, and peeing or pooping in the house. Some dogs can become agitated and restless when depressed and cannot be comforted or calmed. The main thing to watch for is a change in behavior whether it's sudden or takes place gradually.

After your holistic veterinarian has not found a medical explanation for the change in your dog's behavior, there are many things you can do to help your dog rebound from his depression.

Canine Acupressure & Behavioral Techniques

Most dogs pull out of their slump in a short time on their own. However, there are dogs that have trouble bouncing back after sliding into a depression. These dogs are suffering, and they need help.

Acupressure can bring renewed vitality to your dog. Whether he is grieving a loss or bewildered by changes in his life, his behavior indicates he has lost his vitality. In Chinese medicine, *chi*, life-promoting energy, can become blocked and stagnant when the animal is sad. By stimulating specific acupressure points, also called "acupoints," you can revitalize the flow of chi throughout his body which, in turn, can re-energize his emotional wellbeing.

It can take a few acupressure sessions to see the effects of working with acupoints known to enhance and restore the harmonious flow of chi especially when your dog has been experiencing depression for a long time. The added benefit of giving your dog an acupressure session is you are giving him the attention he really needs. If there have been changes in the members of your "pack" that's triggered his depression, being the agent of his revitalization is important.

Along with offering your dog acupressure sessions, canine behaviorists offer a lot of good suggestions for helping your dog overcome depression. Providing extra attention by playing with your dog, going for walks, heading out to the dog park for more canine socializing are ways to get your dog going again. The more exercise you can give him, the better his vital chi energy will be. Dogs like routine, be sure to maintain as consistent an eating and exercising schedule as you can. When he shows more interest in activity, be sure to reward him.

Be careful not to reward his depressed inactivity. You can snuggle and love your dog because that's good for both of you but try not to link his sad behavior in a way he could get the idea you are rewarding him for it.

Dogs are fun-loving creatures. With patience and love, you can bring your special dog back to being to his naturally happy, energetic self with a little help from canine acupressure.



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CANINE ACUPRESSURE MERIDIAN CHART

