

# dogs & more

India's premium pet mag

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# A LIFE IN THE DAY OF Dr Akshay Shah



PHOTOGRAPHS: VIJAY BARATHE

**With an aim to provide holistic treatment to animals, Dr Akshay Shah believes in acupuncture for natural healing**

**R**ight from my birth, it was presumed that I would grow up to become Dr Akshay Shah, for I was born into a whole family of doctors. My father was an orthopaedic surgeon and mother, a gynaecologist. Along with medical experts, I also grew up among multiple pets including birds, fish and a dog. Needless to say, my love for animals grew stronger than the lure of taking on my family-owned hospital. I most definitely grew up to be a doctor, but with one difference; I became a vet.

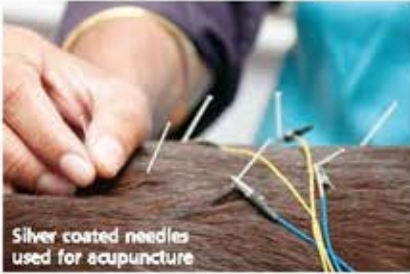
My journey started from Bombay Veterinary College where I did my graduation and Masters in Pathology. However, I used to feel quite concerned about the amount of medicines, especially pain killers, that the animals were given. While these pain killers give instant relief, they also cause several side effects. I wanted to give the animals

a treatment that worked towards holistic health and healing. It was my father who gave me the life-changing idea of practicing acupuncture. I did a course in acupuncture from Chi Institute in Florida and started my practice in Bombay.

Based on the concept of eastern medicine, acupuncture believes that energy runs in the entire body through various meridians, and each organ has a meridian. This therapy uses very thin needles, which are inserted through the skin to stimulate the points associated with the organ being treated. From the thought of it, one may feel that this will make the animal yell and scream in pain, but on the contrary, as soon as the points are stimulated, the animals start feeling relaxed. It has a calming and therapeutic effect. Moreover, the needles are too thin to cause any pain.

I get several patients, in most cases older dogs, who suffer from problems like spinal injury, hip dysplasia, spondylitis, cerebral palsy, even paralysis and arthritis, seeking this treatment for healing or pain relief. One of my patients Elvis has been getting treatment at my clinic since the past 6 months. He had come in with a limp on his hind legs, and today he can walk on all fours, even jump around like the active, playful brat he is! All he wants is a few pats and rubs, and he is ready to hop on the table for the session to begin.

A session typically goes on for 20 minutes, during which the dog must lie down without moving much. Many times, I have noticed that they do not feel calm and comfortable in a new surrounding, so I offer home visits. This is especially useful in cases when the dogs are older in age or heavier



Silver coated needles used for acupuncture



Needles of all sizes used for various parts of the body



This device introduces low level light for pain relief



Elvis the friendly dog gets acupuncture with mild electric currents



Arjun gets treated with low level light therapy for shoulder pain

in weight, making it difficult for their parents to bring them in. Acupuncture is a therapy that relies a lot on energies, so a home visit also ensures that the energy around the dog is positive.

At times, pet parents hear of my clinic and come for a visit, but don't seem to believe in acupuncture as an effective treatment. And since pets feed off the energy of their parents, they may not be able to respond to the treatment very easily. And yet, there are some pets with a very strong will power, which helps them heal. Seeing this, the parents start believing in it.

I definitely feel that the awareness about these safer, alternative treatments needs to grow among animal lovers. I freelance at many private clinics, some vets too refer their patients to my clinic for treatments. I also work with a few NGOs in Bombay for treating animals with injuries and other health problems. In some cases, I don't charge at all, or accept just a very small charge, for these treatments as after all I am here to help those in need; usually the charges for a session of acupuncture are ₹1500 at the clinic and up to ₹2500 for a home visit.

Not just small animals, even bigger animals can benefit from these treatments. As a service to the society, I visit villages where I educate farmers on cattle rearing, giving them the right knowledge on how to take care of cows, sheep and other farm animals. I have treated several cases of cows that have problems with milking due to some issues with their udders. Even wild animals can be helped using acupuncture. I recently treated a hyena at the zoo with a combination of acupuncture, low level light therapy and laser. My next patient is going to be an elephant suffering from a wound that has not healed in a while.

Low level light therapy and laser therapy are other treatments that I practice, apart from dry acupuncture. When we introduce light to the body, the healing benefits of the light stimulate

the cells, naturally relieving pain. I also administer Bach Flower Therapy, which uses essential oils for healing. I am also a certified animal homeopath, probably the first in India to get a degree in veterinary homeopathy.

I am happy that I can provide holistic healthcare to animals, especially those in their old age who can't tolerate the side effects of traditional medicine. These therapies work effectively, have long term benefits and are 100% safe treatments. What's next for me? I plan to take up aromatherapy, that uses herbal medicine and essential oils to calm the body, and continue serving the animals in need.

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