

Is Fido fearful

Acupressure can help

by Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis

The sight of a dog cowering in a corner, legs trembling and head down, breaks any animal lover's heart. Though this example is extreme, many dogs live within the spectrum of being intermittently timid or fearful to being numbingly petrified and overly self-protective. At any level, fear causes a lot of stress and suffering.

Fear and timidity have many causes. The most common are abuse and neglect, lack of socialization and training, a submissive temperament and/or high flight drive, or an undetected medical issue. Some dogs, such as herding breeds, are more inclined to be timid because their work and survival traditionally depend on being acutely protective.

For the sake of these dogs and the people around them, guardians and trainers, along with conventional and complementary healthcare providers, have developed good approaches to help these struggling animals.

Start with a check-up

The first step is to rule out any underlying medical problem. Dogs that do not feel well or are in pain can act fearfully or defensively. Have the dog checked by a holistic veterinarian.

Once a medical problem has been ruled out, training and behavior modification can help. Canine behaviorists and trainers have devised programs that assist with everything from lack of confidence and submissiveness to defensive aggression problems. For instance, many dogs, especially northern breeds, suffer from thunder phobia and will run and hide



during a storm. A trainer or behaviorist can design a progressive desensitization program that will slowly help the dog overcome this fear while also building his self-confidence through other training techniques. Problem behaviors like submissive urination, meanwhile, can be extinguished through a well designed counter-conditioning program.

Many trainers, behaviorists and healthcare practitioners are adding complementary therapies when working with timid and fearful dogs. These include the ancient Chinese modality of acupressure, which has been proven to help lessen anxiety while building new coping skills.



The acupressure approach

Acupressure, like acupuncture, is based on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). To perform an acupressure session, we use our fingers, while a professional acupuncturist uses needles to stimulate specific pools of energy on the body. Everyone can offer their dog an acupressure session since it is non-invasive, readily available, and perfectly safe. The more you know, the more effective acupressure can be, but an animal can receive tremendous benefit from it even when the person offering it has little or no experience.

Acupressure works with the life-promoting energy of the body known as “Chi” in Chinese (also seen as “Qi” or “Ki”). In TCM, health and well-being occurs when Chi flows harmoniously through the body. When this flow is disrupted or blocked, the energy in the animal’s body becomes imbalanced, leading to physical and emotional ill-health.

From a TCM perspective, when a dog is overly timid or fearful, he is not experiencing a harmonious flow of Chi. Fear and timidity constrict and block the flow, causing an imbalance.

To re-establish the flow and remove the blockages along the energy pathways of the dog’s body, we press down with our thumb or index finger on a particular pool of energy. These energy pools are called “acupoints” and they are same points used by acupuncturists. By holding an acupoint, you are influencing the flow of Chi and allowing the body to rebalance its own harmonious flow.

Session for reducing timidity and fear

The purpose of an acupressure session is to reduce the level of the dog’s fear in general. It may not be wise to perform the session while the dog is experiencing extreme fear. Be sure to gauge how safe it is to work with the dog and wait until he isn’t in a heightened or agitated state.

The following acupoints were selected to address timidity and fear so the dog can feel less anxious and more open to new patterns of behavior. Each of these points (see chart pg. 54) has the capacity to release energy so the dog’s Chi will be balanced and

flow harmoniously through his body.

GOVERNING VESSEL 20, HEAVEN’S GATE (GV 20) – benefits the spirit of the animal while also clearing the mind of anxiety and fear.

HEART 7, MIND DOOR (HT 7) – known for calming the mind, relieving disturbances of spirit, and allowing for new patterns to be developed.

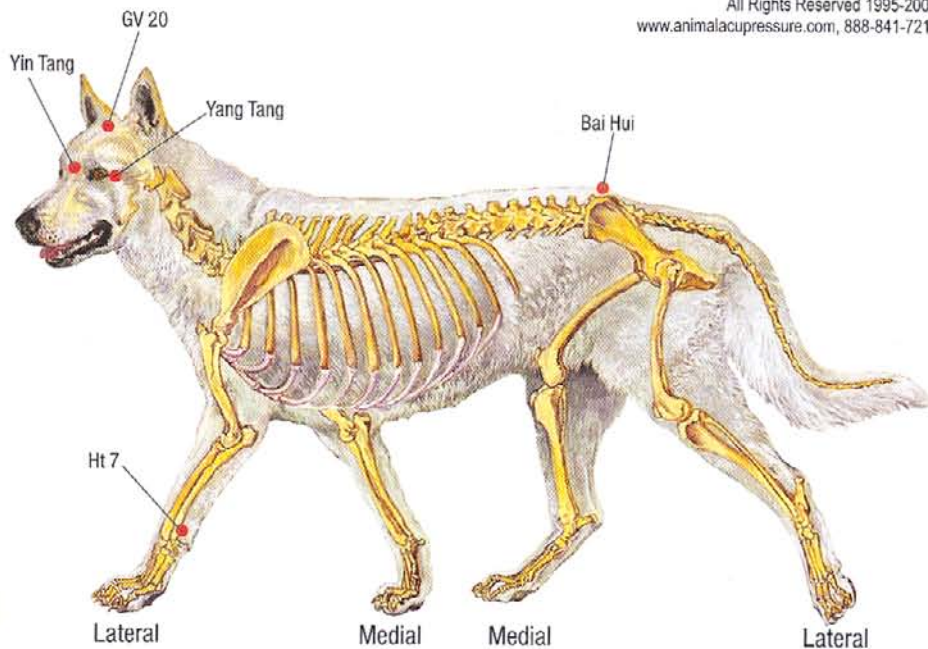
YIN TANG AND YANG TANG – *Yin Tang* is used to elevate the dog’s ability to focus for training. If the dog is overly-focused and unable to relinquish it, use the *Yang Tang* acupoint to disperse it and relieve the intensity of fear.

BAI HUI, POINT OF A HUNDRED MEETINGS – a traditional animal point that increases his sense of well-being. Most dogs love this point when you give it a good scratch.

Place the soft tip of your thumb on the point and simply press down gently yet with intention. Place your other hand comfortably on the dog as well. Slowly count to 30 while you’re applying pressure or until the dog

FEAR & TIMIDITY POINTS

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demonstrates that he has released the acupoint by yawning, licking, stretching, rolling over, passing air, or even falling asleep. Then move on to the next acupoint.

For smaller dogs, it is easier to use the two-finger point work technique. Place your middle finger on top of your index finger and press down on the acupoint gently but with intention. Again, slowly count to 30 or move to the next point when the dog indicates he has released energy.

While holding each acupoint, focus on how much you want to help your dog overcome his fears and be more confident and comfortable on this earth. This helps reinforce the session.

For maximum benefit, perform this acupressure session every five or six days along with any other behavioral resources you have chosen for your dog.

Acupressure is an effective tool to be used in conjunction with any training, desensitization, or counter-conditioning program. By performing this work, you are diminishing your canine companion's fears, enhancing your personal bond, and giving him the precious gift of well being.

POINTS

LOCATION

Yin Tang	Located on the dorsal midline, between the eyes (about at the 3rd eye)
Yang Tang	Found lateral to the outer canthus of the eye, just above the cheek bone
GV 20	On the dorsal midline, about level with the front edge of the ears
Bai Hui	Located on the dorsal midline, at the lumbosacral space
Ht 7	Found above the transverse crease of the carpal joint, in the large depression on the lateral side of the foreleg