



# OSTEOARTHRITIS

**Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis show you how to ease the pain and slow it down with acupressure**

**N**o horse is immune to arthritis. Both young and old horses can experience osteoarthritis, though we see it in older horses more often. The horse's weight-bearing joints, the hock, fetlock, pastern and coffin joints are most susceptible to arthritic changes. It is less common for a horse to develop arthritis in the stifle joints and spinal column, but it does happen, and osteoarthritis can affect other joints where there's been an injury or repetitive,

abnormal stress applied over a period of time.

Osteoarthritis is the most common equine degenerative joint disease. It can be the result of impact trauma, injury, over use, infection, poor conformation, hereditary issues, mineral or dietary deficiencies and aging. Horses involved in competitive activities are more apt to develop arthritis at an earlier age due to the increased stress on their joints.

Being aware of common causes, combined with early detection of arthritis, affords us the opportunity to slow the progression of the disease. Early signs of arthritis can be:

- Mild swelling and heat in the joint

- Reluctance or refusal to perform in his usual sport
- Stiffness following inactivity
- Decrease in joint flexibility (range of motion)
- Crunching sound (crepitus) when the joint is flexed
- Tenderness of joint upon palpation
- Tiring more quickly than usual
- Sudden attitude or mood change.

Older horses are most likely to develop arthritis. During the first two years of a horse's life his body produces cartilage in his joints faster than it is worn away. Cartilage is the smooth material covering the bones and protecting those inside joint capsule. After the age of two cartilage is created

at about the same rate it is worn down. By the age of fifteen, the horse's body produces cartilage at a slower rate than it is being worn away. Additionally, the synovial fluid, which lubricates the joints and helps them glide, tends to become thin and less plentiful with age.

When cartilage is worn away and there's less synovial fluid in the joint, the opposing bones receive greater impact. As a horse ages, or if young horse is injured, his tendons and ligaments are not as strong and flexible as they need to be for joint stability. These conditions can lead to inflammation, pronounced swelling and obvious lameness. The body's natural reaction to this painful condition is to grow more bone in an attempt to protect itself. The over-growth of bone indicates severe osteoarthritis. This condition is very painful and mobility is definitely compromised.

We want our horses to enjoy active lives for as long as possible and since we have yet to find a way to make our horses or ourselves grow younger each day, we have to do our best to be alert to the initial signs of osteoarthritis. Avoiding injuries and not over-working your horse helps ease the stress on his joints. Adding a simple acupressure session to your after-exercise grooming routine helps bring healthy nourishment to your horse's joints and surrounding tissues.

### AN ACUPRESSURE SESSION

By offering your horse an acupressure session after training or riding out you are supporting the enhancement of nutrients to his joints while removing toxin build up in the tissues. This will ease any pain from the workout, support the replenishment of synovial fluid and bring blood supply to the tissues of the joints which reduces the risk of

developing osteoarthritis or having it progress rapidly.

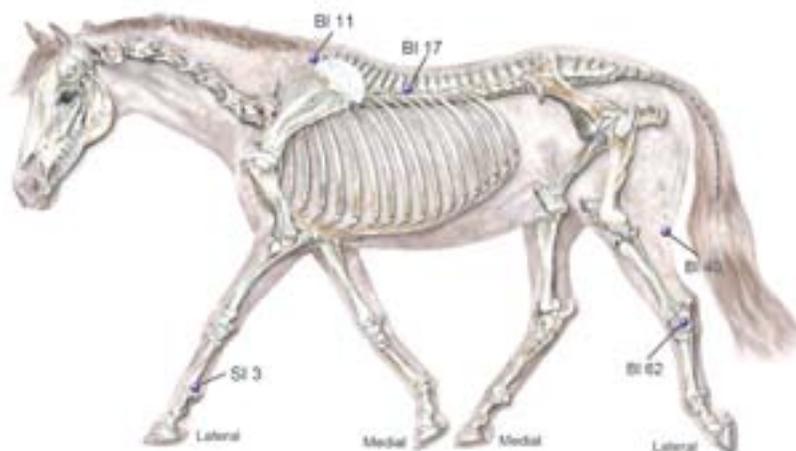
There are specific acupressure points, commonly called acupoints, that facilitate the supply of vital substances to the cartilage, bone and tissues. The health of joints is dependent on the flow of chi, life-promoting energy, and blood which nourishes them. After thousands of years of clinical observation, Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners have shown by stimulating particular acupoints we can enhance the harmonious flow of chi and blood through and around the animal's joints.

The acupoints selected for a general joint health acupressure session in the Equine Joint Health chart above are not specific to a particular joint. If you suspect

your horse has or is in the process of developing osteoarthritis, please consult your holistic veterinarian and acupressure practitioner for more specific acupoints for the area of concern. We would also advise consulting an equine nutritionist.

Having your horse move well and feel good for lots of years keeps us all happy. Horses are stoic by nature, so it is up to you to watch for the early, tell-tale signs arthritis.

## Equine Joint Health



Point	Location / Function
BI 11	1.5 inches off the dorsal midline, between the 3rd and 4th thoracic vertebrae. The point is in front of the withers, over the cervical serratus ventralis muscle. Supports the health of bones.
BI 17	3 inches off the dorsal midline, at the 12th thoracic vertebra. Enriches blood and promotes circulation.
BI 40	Found at the midpoint of the crease of the popliteal fossa (behind the stifle joint), between the two large muscles. Enhances the flow of chi and blood to the hindquarters.
BI 62	Found in a depression beneath the hock on the outside of the leg. Commonly used for arthritis issues.
SI 3	Located in a depression on the back edge of the cannon bone, at the end of the lateral splint, close to the fetlock. Increases chi and blood to the forelimb joints.

Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis are authors of many books including *Acu-Horse: A Guide to Equine Acupressure*

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