

Gold treatment relieves pain in dogs

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Photo: crestock

Many animals and people experience chronic joint pain. In dogs, a common source of joint pain is hip dysplasia, a developmental defect of the hip joint. Implantation of gold into the soft tissues around the hip joints of dogs with dysplasia can relieve pain and lessen stiffness for several years.

Joint pain in animals and man may be due to injury, wear or deformity. Hip dysplasia of dogs is a congenital defect that makes itself known during the growth phase, leading to varying degrees of pain and loss of function as the dogs age. Dog owners will as a rule notice that their dogs are reluctant to jump, that they lag behind on longer walks, or that they

are stiff and sore when standing after resting. Some dogs also become lame after longer walks.

Early in the 1970's, an American veterinary surgeon and acupuncturist described a form of pain relief in dogs that involved implanting small grains of pure gold into acupuncture points round painful joints in dogs. The theory behind the treatment was that the gold grains implanted into the acupuncture points would provide chronic stimulation of the points.

The method has been used both on dogs and people in the USA and Europe, although no scientific documentation of the pain-relieving affect of gold-implants existed. Gry Tove Jæger has in her doctorate investigated whether grains of metallic gold implanted around painful joints could reduce pain and improve function in patients, using dogs as a model.

Dogs with hip dysplasia as an experimental model

Family dogs with pain and loss of function due to hip dysplasia were chosen as experimental animals. The dogs were divided randomly into two groups, one of which received gold transplants, while the other acted as control. Neither the owner nor the veterinarian assessing the affect of the gold treatment knew which group an individual dog belonged to. This is called double-blind experimentation. The study was designed to provide an answer to whether gold implantation had an effect or not, and any possible acupuncture effect was not considered.

After six months the effect of the treatment was considered. Statistically-significant differences were shown to exist between the two groups. The dogs with implanted gold had less pain and loss of function compared to those that had not received gold. As was expected, the dogs in the control group also improved, but the effect was greater in those that had received gold.

The dogs were followed for a further year and a half. After two years, 80% of the dogs still showed a positive effect of treatment. The hip dysplasia had not improved, and many [dogs](#) showed in fact an increased degree of calcification round the affected [hip](#) joints, but they lived better after the gold treatment. An inflammatory response was shown to have developed around the grains of gold, which may possibly explain in part the pain-relieving effect.

Implantation of gold is an effective treatment for chronic degenerative joint disease and the method has few serious side-effects. This study could not uncover if part of the effect was due to acupuncture, to the [gold](#) lying in the soft tissue, or to a combination of the two.

Cand. med. vet. Gry Jæger defended her Ph. D. thesis, entitled "The effect of [gold](#) bead implantation in a dog model with chronic joint arthritis - a method of pain control", at the Norwegian School of Veterinary Science, on May 29, 2009.

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