

Small Animal *Tui-na* Techniques for Home Care

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ABSTRACT

Tui-na is a manual therapy that is one of the five branches of traditional Chinese veterinary medicine (TCVM) and uses Chinese medical theory as the basis for its application and actions. It was first used in the 16th-11th centuries BC and references to this treatment can be found in the *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperors Inner Classic 475-221 BC). From a conventional medicine perspective, *Tui-na* can be thought of as corresponding to a combination of acupressure, conventional massage and chiropractic techniques. It can be used to regulate the Channels, soothe joints and sinews, promote circulation of *Qi* and Blood, strengthen the immune system and promote normal function of the *Zang-fu* organs. *Tui-na* is most commonly used to treat acute and chronic musculoskeletal conditions and is also useful as a preventative medicine therapy, because it promotes balance in the body. Small and large animals and exotic species respond well to *Tui-na* treatments and it can be used for animals that will not allow acupuncture needles to be placed. It is safe and effective with no known side effects. Although veterinarians must receive specific training in the techniques and applications of *Tui-na*, once mastered several *Tui-na* techniques can be easily taught to caretakers for home treatments. *Mo-fa* (touching skin and muscle), *Rou-fa* (rotary kneading), *Ca-fa* (rubbing), *Tui-fa* (pushing), *An-fa* (pressing), *Nie-fa* (pinching), *Dou-fa* (shaking), *Ba-sheng-fa* (stretching) and *Cuo-fa* (kneading) are *Tui-na* techniques that caretakers can learn and use to accelerate the healing process and deepen the connection with their animals.

Keywords: *Tui-na*, *An-mo*, acupressure, massage, chiropractic, traditional Chinese veterinary medicine, *Huang Di Nei Jing*

Tui-na is a manual therapy that is one of the five branches of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and uses Chinese medical theory as the basis for its application and actions. *Tui-na* is often referred to as Chinese medical massage and the word *Tui-na* can be literally translated as “push-grab”. This term did not occur in the Chinese literature until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD), where it first appeared in a book on pediatric *Tui-na*. Before this period, the most common term for Chinese medical massage was “*An-mo*” which literally means “pressing and rubbing.” *Tui-na* uses massage, acupressure, traction and manipulation techniques for the prevention and treatment of disease and was developed through empirical experience.¹

The use of *An-mo* (*Tui-na*) dates back to the Yin-Shang Dynasty (16th-11th centuries BC). Several references can be found throughout Chinese history that refer to a 10-volume work entitled *Huang Di Qi Po An Mo*. These texts were reportedly the earliest Chinese medical texts devoted entirely to *An-mo* (*Tui-na*). The original text was lost or destroyed, but quotes from it can be found in other books. The *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperors Inner Classic 475-221 BC) is the earliest surviving canonical text of Chinese medicine and refers to *An-mo* in over 25 different chapters. One chapter of the *Huang Di Nei Jing* in particular states that *Tui-na* originated in the central area of China (Henan, Luoyang). In other sections *Tui-na* techniques were recorded as being successful in the treatment of various disorders, including joint pain (*Bi* syndrome), muscle weakness and atrophy (*Wei* syndrome), facial paralysis and stomach pain. Other chapters of the *Huang Di Nei Jing* describe the therapeutic effects of *Tui-na* that include resolving pain, moving *Qi*, invigorating Blood, eliminating Pathogens and dispersing Heat (having the ability to relieve fever) in specific cases. The synergistic relationship between acupuncture and *Tui-na* treatments is also discussed in the *Huang Di Nei Jing*. In the *Ling-shu* section of the *Huang Di Nei Jing*, it was written to first massage the area to be needled, then insert the needle, then massage again after withdrawal. In TCM universities in China today, the acupuncture major in TCM is actually a combination acupuncture and *Tui-na*, which emphasizes the close relationship between these two branches of TCM.^{1,2}

From a conventional medicine perspective, *Tui-na* can be thought of as corresponding to a combination of acupressure, conventional massage and chiropractic techniques. According to TCM theory, disease develops from body imbalances. *Tui-na* works to bring *Yin* and *Yang* into balance via manipulations that tonify Deficiencies and sedative manipulations to clear Excesses. *Tui-na* has clinically been observed to help promote and regulate normal circulation of *Qi* and *Blood* through the Channels of the body and restore balance (restore *Yin-Yang* balance). *Tui-na* can be used to promote normal functioning of the internal organs (“balance *Zang Fu* organs”) and improve immune function (“strengthen body resistance”).

In traditional Chinese veterinary medicine (TCVM) *Tui-na* is most commonly used for the treatment of acute and chronic conditions of the musculoskeletal system. *Tui-na* treatments can be useful to align and restore the normal anatomic relationships of the bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments of the body (“soothe tendons and ligaments”) in these conditions. *Tui-na* can also be useful to treat problems of the digestive and respiratory systems and is well suited for tonification and strengthening weak, chronically ill, geriatric and pediatric animals. Small and large animals as well as exotic species can be treated with *Tui-na*, which is especially useful for the treatment of fractious animals that will not allow acupuncture. Many TCVM practitioners combine *Tui-na* with acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, Food Therapy and an exercise/lifestyle programs for an enhanced therapeutic effect. *Tui-na* is a safe and effective therapy with no known side effects and is contraindicated in pregnant animals, open wounds, skin injuries, dermatitis, fractures, phlebitis and infectious diseases with zoonotic and or iatrogenic transmission potential.³

TUI-NA TECHNIQUES

Over the years, many different types of *Tui-na* techniques have been developed in China. Dr Han Ping, a professor of *Tui-na/An-mo* at Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, has compiled six systems of *Tui-na* techniques (Table 1).³ These six *Tui-na* systems were developed for use in humans, but are easily adapted to animals and have similar applications in veterinary medicine. While performing any *Tui-na* technique, it is important that hand manipulation should be kept soft and fluid and appropriate evenness, duration and force of pressure be applied for optimal clinical results. Veterinary *Tui-na* practitioners are typically trained to perform all of Dr Han’s techniques (Table 1). However it is common to also teach caretakers to perform *Tui-na* techniques on their pets at home to help relieve pain and hasten recovery. Not all *Tui-na* techniques are appropriate for home treatment, but the nine techniques outlined below are simple, safe and effective and can easily be taught to clients for home treatments.

- ***Mo-fa* (touching skin and muscle):** *Mo-fa* is performed by rubbing the skin in a spiral, rhythmic motion using the palms of the hands and fingers with light to moderate pressure. This technique is thought to use nervous system reflexes to exert an effect through the skin and superficial connective tissues to restore order to the circulation and may promote homeostatic reactions in internal organs. *Mo-Fa* is often used as a general introductory technique for *Tui-na* to acclimate animals for other techniques and is especially useful for weak and geriatric animals. It is used to regulate *Qi*, harmonize the Middle Burner (*Zhong Jiao*), drain Stagnation and remove accumulations and can be used to treat constipation, diarrhea and food retention.
- ***Rou-fa* (rotary kneading):** *Rou-Fa* is performed with a gentle rotational motion using the ball of the fingers and the heel of the hand. This is one of the most common *Tui-na* methods and is used to regulate the actions of the other techniques. It functions to harmonize the *Ying* and *Wei*, resolve *Qi* and *Blood* Stagnation, relieve pain and eliminate food retention. *Rou-Fa* is especially good for Deficient animals and is often used as an introductory technique at various acupoints and *Ah-shi* points all over the body, before using techniques that work on deeper tissues. It is commonly combined with *An-fa* to produce a combination technique *Rou-An-Fa*
- ***Ca-fa* (rubbing):** *Ca-fa* is performed by applying rapid, linear and moderately forceful movements of the palms, while firmly touching the skin. This technique produces softly warming stimulation to the skin and underlying tissues. It warms the Channels and Collaterals. It is very useful for *Yang* Deficient geriatric animals that feel cold to the touch and for *Qi* Stagnation and Cold Patterns with abdominal and lumbar pain. It is very useful to treat chronic renal failure with *Yang* Deficiency and in animals with poor peripheral circulation it can be combined with *Cuo-fa* discussed below.
- ***Tui-fa* (pushing):** *Tui-fa* is performed in a forceful one-directional movement using the finger, thumb, palm or elbow that follow the lines of major muscles, tendons and ligaments. It can be performed using the index fingers and/or thumb bilaterally along the epaxial muscle groups of the spine from T10-L7 in a smooth gliding motion along these tissues especially useful in animals with intervertebral disk disease (IVDD). Initially very light pushing should be used with progressively deeper pressure as the tissues and the animal allow. *Tui-fa* can be alternated with *An-fa* described below. This technique is used to relax the tendons and invigorate Blood and *Qi* flow. It is one of the more common techniques to treat the vertebral

column and limbs for *Bi* syndrome, IVDD and spondylosis and is one of the most important techniques to soften the connective tissues. It can also be used to dissipate nodules and masses. *Tui-fa* is similar to myofascial release techniques practiced in other conventional body-work techniques.

- ***An-fa* (pressing):** *An-fa* is applying light pressure to an area using the thumb and or index finger with deeper pressure gradually applied. This technique is often performed with or following *Rou-fa* (discussed above). This single finger pressing technique is used to relieve *Qi* and Blood Stagnation and unblock obstruction.
- ***Nie-fa* (pinching):** *Nie-fa* is performed by pinching and squeezing the skin and epaxial muscles of the vertebral column with the fingers. This technique is useful to invigorate the Blood and *Qi* and regulate the Spleen and Stomach and is especially important to help stimulate appetite. *Nie-fa* is commonly used to regulate the vertebral column.
- ***Dou-fa* (shaking):** During *Dou-fa* each limb is continuously shaken or vibrated gently with an up-down motion using both hands, while fully supporting the limb. This technique is used to regulate the *Qi* and Blood and smooths the joints.
- ***Ba-sheng-fa* (stretching):** The caretaker is asked to pull and apply gentle traction to the muscles and joints of the limbs. Traction on the tail can also be applied as part of this treatment for 10 repetitions each time. The owner should strive to perform this technique rhythmically for best results. *Ba-Sheng-Fa* is used to regulate the Channels, mobilize and restore the normal anatomic position of the joints, tendons and ligaments of the pelvic limbs
- ***Cuo-fa* (kneading):** *Cuo-fa* is usually performed on each limb using rapid kneading movements with the palms of both hands, moving back and forth and up and down the limb. The force should be equal in both hands and kneading should be rapid, but the movement up and down the limb should be slow. This technique can also be used on the neck, chest, hypochondriac region, abdomen and waist. This technique regulates the Channels and moves *Qi* and Blood. *Cuo-fa* is typically used at the end of a *Tui-na* treatment.

TUI-NA TIPS

- Emphasize that all treatments are to begin softly and slowly. Too much force is to be avoided and treatments should be done with even pressure
- Caution should be used in performing *Tui-na* on geriatric, weak and debilitated animals that could become further weakened by treatments that are too vigorous or lengthy in duration. *Tui-na* treatments can last 10 minutes to 1 hour
- Don't give owners too many techniques to do at one time; in the author's experience; prescribing only 3-4 different *Tui-na* techniques (no more than 30-45 minutes) are met with the best compliance by the average caretaker
- Give caretakers a *Tui-na* work sheet and write down all techniques to be performed and the duration of each; have the owner keep a log of treatments and review it during recheck examinations.
- Demonstrate to caretakers each *Tui-na* technique to be done; then have them show you how they will do it at home.
- It is recommended that treatment be performed every day to insure that treatments are done at least 3-5 times per week. *Tui-na* once daily is ideal
- It is beneficial to have the caretaker return in 1 week and demonstrate to the veterinarian the assigned *Tui-na* techniques on their pet
- *Tui-na* treatments should be performed before acupuncture needles are placed; it is more effective to massage the area before and after acupuncture for best results
- *Tui-na* techniques may also be supplemented with oral Chinese herbal medicine and herbal liniments, salves, sprays and patches as needed

- It is best to wait 30 minutes following a meal before performing a *Tui-na* treatment to allow normal blood flow to the bowel for proper digestion.

As *Tui-na* can promote balance in the body it can be useful to treat or prevent disease. *Tui-na* can be used to treat small and large animals as well as exotic species and is especially useful for the treatment of animals that will not allow acupuncture needles to be placed. *Tui-na* can be combined with acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, Food Therapy and exercise/lifestyle programs for an enhanced therapeutic effect and has been shown to be safe and effective with no known side effects. There is one national journal in China devoted to research on and the application of *Tui-na*. It is hoped that this valuable information will one day be translated into English for further application of *Tui-na* outside of China. One of the most valuable aspects of *Tui-na* is the active involvement and participation of the owner in a team effort with the veterinarian for the treatment of their pet. The use of *Tui-na* treatments by caretakers can help promote open communication with the veterinarian, facilitate and accelerate the healing process and deepen the human-animal bond.

REFERENCES

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Table 1: Dr. Han Ping's Six *Tui-na* Manipulation systems*

Name of Manipulation	Subdivision of <i>Tui-na</i> Manipulation		
<i>Bai Dong Fa</i>	Swinging	<i>Yi-zhi-chan</i>	Single thumb
		<i>Gun-fa</i>	Rolling
		<i>Rou-fa</i>	Rotary-kneading
<i>Mo Ca Fa</i>	Friction	<i>Mo-fa</i>	Touching skin and muscle
		<i>Ca-fa</i>	Rubbing
		<i>Tui-fa</i>	Pushing
		<i>Cuo-fa</i>	Kneading
		<i>Moo-fa</i>	Daubing/massaging
<i>Ji Ya Fa</i>	Squeezing	<i>An-fa</i>	Pressing
		<i>Dian-fa</i>	Knocking
		<i>Nie-fa</i>	Pinching
		<i>Na-fa</i>	Pulling
		<i>Nian-fa</i>	Holding/Kneading
<i>Zhen Dong Fa</i>	Trembling	<i>Dou-fa</i>	Shaking
		<i>Zhen-fa</i>	Vibrating
<i>Kou- Ji Fa</i>	Percussing	<i>Pai-fa</i>	Patting
		<i>Ji-fa</i>	Beating
Special manipulations for the passive movement of joints		<i>Yao-fa</i>	Rocking
		<i>Bei-fa</i>	Carrying
		<i>Ban-fa</i>	Wrenching
		<i>Ba-shen-fa</i>	Stretching or drawing

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