Just about all horses LOVE moxibustion. They lower their head, get a sleepy look in their eyes and then start licking, chewing, and yawning. It’s no surprise because moxa relieves muscle tension, stimulates the release of endorphins, increases energy flow, and improves circulation.

**Moxa for Muscles**

Using moxa is one of the best ways to relieve your horse’s chronic muscle tension. It relaxes muscles that are tense from chronic stress, injury, improper training, overall body weakness, and poor conformation. The heat from burning moxa penetrates deeply, encouraging chronically stressed muscles to relax and release. When your horse is more relaxed and happy she’ll move out with longer strides and smoother movement.

As Jessie walked toward the small dirt paddock, she had a confused look on her face. She saw her horse Frisky standing in a thick cloud of smoke and me waving what looked like a lit cigar over her horse’s back. Her usually hyperactive mare let out a huge yawn and lowered her head almost to the ground. I’m not sure which was more surprising to Jessie – the smoky spectacle or the dramatic change in her mare’s demeanor. I just smiled. Like most horses receiving a moxa session, Frisky was in a happy trance and fully relaxed.

Standing at your horse’s hind end you can apply moxa to the large hardworking muscles of her hindquarters. Be sure to keep your spare hand nearby to feel for heat buildup.

Using Moxa with Your Horse

by Susan Tenney, CMT

**HEAT:**

**Acupointers**

All photos courtesy of Elemental Acupressure
Getting STARTED

Before charging out to the barn with moxa stick in hand, please take time to practice on yourself first. Also make sure to read this article from beginning to end, including the safety protocol in the sidebars.

To begin, you’ll need a moxa stick. Moxa sticks are made from dried mugwort (*artemisia vulgaris*) rolled into a cigar shape. Moxa sticks are inexpensive and readily available online. You’ll also need a lighter or candle to ignite the moxa, an ashtray, a small bowl of water, some aluminum foil, and an old towel placed in your lap to catch any stray ash.

You’ll be practicing moxibustion on Large Intestine 4 (LI 4). LI 4 is located in the web of skin between the thumb and index finger (see photo). Take a moment to locate the point on your hand. Moxibustion on LI 4 boosts the immune system and keeps colds away when used regularly. It also detoxes the body and helps deal with chronic phlegmy coughs. Do not use moxa on yourself if you are pregnant; practice on a non-pregnant friend instead.

To do your moxa session on LI 4, choose a quiet, well-ventilated place to sit – preferably Slowly lower the lit moxa stick to acupoint LI 4 which lies on the web of skin between your thumb and forefinger. Flick any ashes into an ashtray or small metal bowl.

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Common Sense CAUTIONS

1. Before using moxa, communicate to barn management FIRST. Smoke can cause panic in a barn.
2. Use a well-ventilated area so the smoke can dissipate.
3. NEVER work over straw or wood shavings! Work over dirt or concrete instead.
4. Periodically flick ash from the moxa into a nearby bucket of water.
5. NEVER touch yourself or your horse with the hot end of a burning moxa stick! You will end up with injured skin and burnt fur.
6. Always keep your hand near the site you are working on to monitor heat buildup.
7. Extinguish the moxa by stubbing it out in an ashtray, snipping the ember off into the bucket of water, or by extinguishing the ember with a home-made aluminum foil cap. Be sure the moxa is completely cool before you store it.

OVERHEATING

If your horse becomes restless, agitated, or impatient while receiving moxa, you may have given her too much heat. This happens when moxa is held too close to your horse, or when you’ve stayed too long in one area. If your horse becomes progressively agitated for no clear reason it suggests that she is “heating up” and moxa may not be right for her today. Stop and try again another day.
outside. Light the moxa by holding one end of the stick over a flame until it ignites. You may need to blow gently on the moxa to get it going. When the glowing red ember at the end of the stick begins to radiate heat, you’re ready to start.

Place your free hand on your thigh, palm down. Slowly move the lit end of the moxa stick toward LI 4. You’ll want to get close enough to feel a good amount of heat but not so close that you’re in danger of burning yourself. Most people feel comfortable holding moxa about two inches above their skin. Slowly move the tip in and out or draw small circles over the point. Work for 2 to 4 minutes; then move to the other hand. Repeat if desired.

When you’re done, extinguish the moxa stick by wrapping a good amount of aluminum foil around the hot end. Leave the foil on and when the moxa stick is cold, store it away from light in a cool, dry location. When properly kept, moxa ages well and lasts for years.

Fire it up
Now that you’ve practiced using moxa on yourself, try it with your horse. You’ll need a quiet place where you can work undisturbed. You’ll also need someone to hold your horse during your horse’s moxa session. Your location MUST be away from straw and shavings. Work instead over dirt or cement footing. Have a big bucket of water available just in case.

We’ll be using moxibustion over large muscle groups. Choose one of the following muscle groups to work with: the muscles on either side of the spine, the large shoulder muscles above the elbow, or the big bulky muscles forming the top of the hindquarters. Gently palpate these regions, looking for areas that feel tense. When you find some tense muscles, it’s time to get out

**Moxa MOVEMENTS**

Experiment with these patterns when using moxa.

1. Find a point and slowly move the moxa stick in and out.
2. Draw small slow circles.
3. Draw long slow strokes over an area then lift the stick and return to where you started. Don’t brush back and forth.

To see the Moxa Movements in action, check out our video: [youtu.be/IFV6DuVpgQ](youtu.be/IFV6DuVpgQ)

WHEN not to use moxa

Do not use moxa on:

1. extremely weak horses
2. pregnant mares
3. irritated skin
4. any muscle that is hot or swollen from injury
5. unconscious animals
6. numbed areas like a “nerved” leg
7. infectious conditions
8. animals who become highly agitated during moxibustion
9. horses about to exercise. Moxa is a strong sedative so only use it after exercise.
the moxa. If your horse already feels relaxed and loose, practice with moxa anyway – she’ll love it!

To begin, light the moxa stick. Position your horse so smoke isn’t blowing in her face. Flatten your free hand and place it right next to the area where you’ll be applying heat. With your free hand in this position you’ll be able to carefully monitor the amount of heat your horse is receiving. Choose a moxa movement pattern. Lower the moxa until the hot end is about 4 inches above the area you’re working on. If your horse starts to get worried or nervous, move the moxa at least 6 inches from your horse’s body. As your horse begins to relax, bring the moxa in closer so that the heat penetrates more deeply. Work this area for 3 to 5 minutes then move on to a different area.

A moxa session should deeply relax your horse. After you’ve worked for 5-10 minutes, she’ll be breathing deeply and getting sleepy. You can either stop now or continue the session. Make sure not to overdo it. If this is your first moxa session, please keep it under 30 minutes. When you’ve done a few more moxa sessions, feel free to go longer.

If your horse resists moxa during the first session or two, be patient. Over time, most horses respond well to moxa. It’s a great way to say “thank you” after a long trail ride or a week of hard training!

A moxa stick can put a smile on your face.

Moxa is deeply relaxing. Just a few minutes can put a smile on your face.

About the author:
Susan Tenney, CMT
works internationally as a practitioner of Five Element acupressure for animals. She teaches classes for animal lovers and offers an online certification program through her company Elemental Acupressure. Learn more about her courses, books and acupressure charts at www.ElementalAcupressure.com and www.facebook.com/elemental.acu

Places to AVOID
Don’t use moxa directly over bone or on your horse’s:

- face
- eyes
- genitals
- tendons
- large blood vessels
- the umbilicus of a foal
- open cuts
- hooves

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