
Lilo's Postpartum Massage

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Lilo's "*Hara*" (belly)

Background

Massage is well known amongst humans for it's health benefits including, but not limited to relaxation, stress reduction and pain relief. It is also effectively used as part of postpartum support, as it benefits hormones, reduces swelling, enhances sleep and improves lactation. Several sessions often help the mother return to her pre-pregnant self.

This paper focuses on postpartum canine massage, using acupressure. I have practiced massage, bodywork, “*Shiatsu*” and acupuncture with humans for almost forty years. The skills I honed easily transfer to dogs and cats, and offer me the opportunity to learn more about these amazing creatures, often called our “best friends.” A big thank you to the Ojai School of Canine (and Feline) massage for a fabulous 250 hour course that is paving the way for an exciting new career.

Acupressure, a hands-on massage technique, is used to stimulate acu-points and move energy in the body. The end goal is to help the animal heal and rebalance itself. I call it Acudog Wellness: a service I provide both onsite and online (classes) for pets. (www.acudogwellness.com).



Case history

Lilo a Guardian dog, whelped nine puppies at the Wickersham Farm for Australian Labradoodles in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Her litter consisted of five females and four males.

At the time of her “Acudog Wellness” massage on March 13, 2018, Lilo was five days postpartum. What follows is the story of her session and explanation of the Acupuncture/ Chinese Medicine strategy used in administering postpartum acupressure massage.

Lilo is a friendly, peppy two year old Labradoodle. She acts as though she lives in the house, but is, in fact, a temporary boarder; A Guardian dog and new Mama. The puppies, quarantined in the whelping nursery, are in another section of the large house. Kim (the breeder), and I move to a sunny section of the kitchen where Kim has set up a yoga mat on the kitchen floor, next to a sliding glass

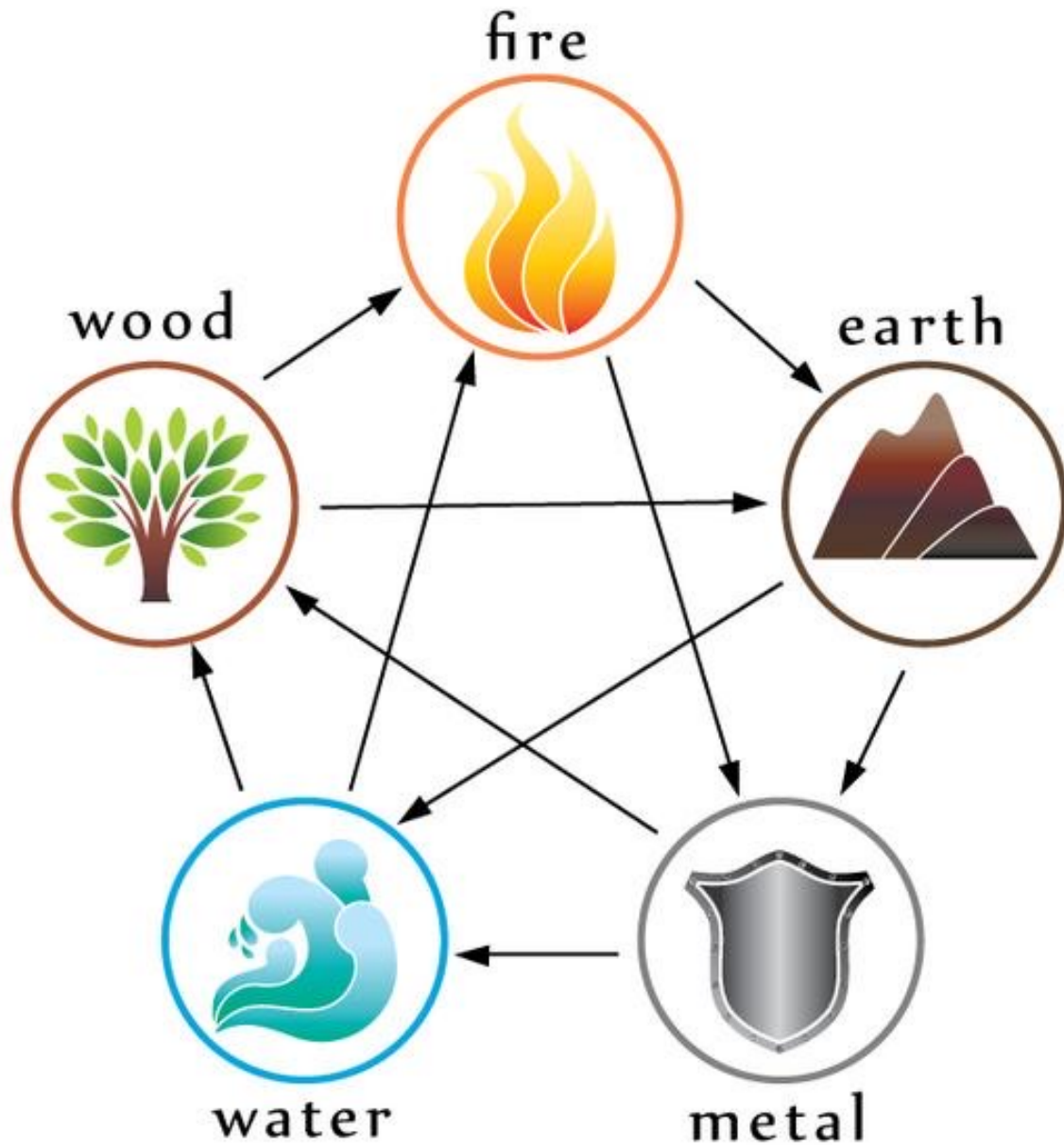
door. The cat follows, very curious about what is about to take place. There is a parrot in the adjoining room and horses outside.

Her intake form indicates that the primary purpose of her massage is for relaxation. She has just whelped her first litter of nine puppies. Two years ago, Kim birthed Lilo and chose her as one of the bitches to continue the Australian Labradoodles line.

Her Five Element intake form suggests strengths in the Earth, Fire and Metal elements, as most all of the “normal” boxes are checked. The Wood and Water elements have less information. This ancient Five Element system is fascinating for accessing the state of a postpartum dog. Based on a “Shen” cycle: (sometimes called the mother/child cycle) the Five Element paradigm is a system of “checks and balances” for bringing balance to the body. In Chinese medicine, pathways of energy in the body, known as channels and meridians, have many associations: such as the broad category of “*yin*” and “*yang*” which pretty much encompass everything: they are opposites, gradations, and the same: together they create a whole. Below are a few qualities of each element:

Water: the “mother” of Wood, with acu-points along Bladder and Kidney channels, is the key element for influencing reproduction and longevity in Chinese Medicine

Wood: associated with spring, officially began on March 20, 2018 (a week after Lilo’s massage) Wood is associated with the smooth flow of qi (loosely translated as energy) the Liver and Gallbladder meridians



Earth : synonymous with nurturing, is also the “grandmother” of water (in the cycle) and linked with the Stomach and Spleen pathways

Fire: The fire element, unlike the other elements, has four meridians: the Heart, (HT) Pericardian (PC) (protector of the heart), Triple

heater, (TH) also known as Sex/Circulation or *Sanjiao*, and Small Intestines (SI) meridian. Fire is associated with joy and love. Lilo appears to be a very happy loving Mama dog ; Kim reports that she is a good mama dog.

Metal: associated with the Lung and Large intestines. The kidneys pull the lung qi down.

Lilo loves being touched and is clearly on high alert from nursing her puppies though we cannot hear them. She has been outside, emptied her bowels and urinated. Her teats are filled with milk. As she sits next to me on the mat, Kimberly begins shooting the video. I start by accessing Lilo, gently feeling her whole body. She is standing on all fours, I notice some birth residue on her tail, which is matted. She is slightly panting, (metal) probably from excitement and thirst. We bring her a bowl of water; it is especially important to hydrate a nursing dog. Beginning with her head and spine, I begin feeling the points between her vertebrae on the Governing Vessel. The dorsal spinal muscles house what is known as the *Huato Jai Ji*, a line of points that support the bladder channel. A famous Five Element acupuncture treatment, called “ Devils and Dragons” is often used after childbirth in humans to boost and clear the Water element, related to reproduction and longevity. It is easily modified by using acupoints (without needles) and gentle finger pressure on her canine body. By pressing “*Shu*” points along the bladder channel (on the dorsum) I support the Yin organs : Lung, Spleen, Heart, Pericardium, Kidney and Liver. Next, I move to her outer Bladder meridian, parallel to, and about an inch from the inner

Lilo : back points



bladder channel. These points often called “spirit” points, are extremely beneficial for boosting the immune system.



I continue to her sacrum to gently press the 8 bi-lateral Balio points: BL: 31, 32, 33 and 34 which nourish and moisten the uterus, move stuck blood and are hormone points. They are located in the sacral foramen.

Next I move to her legs to press immune points :

ST 36, LI 4, LV 3 (Lv 3 and LI 4 are called the “Four Gates” for energy flow) SP 6

ST 36 and SP 6 are earth points, LV 3 is a wood point and LI 4, a metal point. After gently pressing points along her spine and on her legs, I begin feeling her head and pressing a point at the apex called GV 20: “One hundred Meeting Points.” Then I work on her ears.

Gradually she begins to relax and lie down. She is an amazing dog, willing to be nurtured, as she, in turn, nurtures her young. I am very careful to touch her “*hara*”(belly) gently and avoid touching her teats. She allows me to touch her belly indicating trust and vulnerability. At one point during the massage, a very funny thing happens: the house cat, who has been carefully watching the massage, lies down next to Lilo and me. My interpretation is that she also wants a massage. She stretches out and waits. I look over at her and smile, but continue massaging Lilo.

Suddenly the cat jumps up and swats Lilo in the face. The dog is shocked, how dare you interrupt my tranquility - the expression in her eyes is precious. Lilo jumps up and moves away. I ask Kim to put the cat in another room - in so doing the parrot becomes very



vocal, protesting that she has to be in a cage to prevent the cat from eating her!

We offer Lilo water and a treat, and resume her massage. The last part of her massage is what makes massage, at least for me, a truly amazing and spiritual experience. Lilo is lying on her side, her swollen belly and teats exposed. She allows me to touch her belly softly; I hold my hands on her swollen *Hara* for several minutes. For me, it is massage as an art form, learned from the great masters. It is the amazing connection that can occur using touch, between two beings, where no words are necessary but each one of us knows that the body, mind and spirit are healing.

Helpful Postpartum points

LI4 (Hegu) Joining Valley

KI 3 (Taixi) Greater Stream

SP6 (Sanyinjiao) Three Yin Meeting

PC6 (Neiguan) Inner Gate

BL26 (Guanyuanshu) Original Gate Back Transporting Point

BL28 (Pangguangshu) Bladder Back Transporting Point

LV3 (Ququan) Spring and Bend

BL13 (Feishu) Lung Back Transporting Point

BL15 (Xinshu) Heart Back Transporting Point

BL18 Liver Back Transporting Point

BL47 (Ganshu) (Hunmen) Door of the Ethereal Soul

BL20 (Pishu) Spleen Back Transporting Point

BL 23 (Shenshu) Kidney Back Transporting Point

* Acupressure point locations are approximations. Japanese acupuncture point locations are different than traditional Chinese ones. All move and vary with each individual or animal. It is important to palpate and intuit the points to find their location.

Back *Shu* points, also called association points, are noteworthy, because they are associated with, connected to, and influence the internal organs. The five element acupuncture protocol that boosts and clears all of the yin organs (lung, spleen, heart, pericardium, kidney & liver) called “Devils and Dragons,” uses the back *Shu* points.

Huato Jai Ji points are considered an extra line with pathway points next to the spine, and along the muscle. Pulling the skin up and scratching are additional techniques that can be used in addition to pressing the points.

A final Note on the power of touch and connection:



“ The Rescuing Hug ”

This is a beautiful story that shows the amazing power of touch and love. Called “The Rescuing Hug” the article details the first week of life of a set of twins. Each baby was in an incubator. The smaller, (left) baby was not expected to live. A hospital nurse fought against the hospital rules and placed them into one incubator. The healthier of the two through an arm over her sister. The smaller baby’s heart stabilized and her temperature rose to normal.
