



Massage Therapy

It doesn't just "feel good." **Massage** can be a powerful tool to help you take charge of your horse's health and well-being.

What is massage?

Massage is a general term for pressing, rubbing and manipulating the skin, muscles, tendons and ligaments. Massage may range from light stroking to deep pressure.

Benefits of massage

Massage is generally considered part of complementary and alternative medicine. Studies of the benefits of massage for people demonstrate that it is an effective treatment for reducing stress, pain, and muscle tension. Some of the benefits of equine massage therapy, to name just a few, are pain relief, stimulation of the motor nerves, relief from restlessness and sleep disturbance, and improved proprioception. Massage is also thought to help calm nervous horses or horses in unfamiliar surroundings and/or stressful conditions. Massage is not just a once a year luxury. Effective therapeutic massage uses the therapist's knowledge and hands to assist the rider and horse's relationship to be more synergistic.

- Equine massage reduces injury potential
- Encourages horse's willingness to perform
- Creates better communication between horse and rider

Horses, like any athlete, need proper maintenance so that they can perform optimally! It is very difficult for a rider or driver to know...

- The cause of a horse not bending when there's no obvious signs of lameness. *(The horse may have a tight muscle in his/her back.)*
- The reason a horse isn't wanting to go onto the bit. *(May have to do with some soreness of the neck.)*
- Why the horse kicks out when asked to change leads. *(This may be old or new saddle soreness restricting shoulder movement.)*

The typical list of benefits of equine massage reads as such:

- Dilates blood vessels
- Returns blood back toward heart
- Helps drain sluggish lymph material
- Improves muscle tone
- Prevents adhesions
- Stretches connective tissue
- Lessens stiffness and swelling
- Has a stimulating or sedative effect on nervous system
- Brings awareness to the area being massaged

How does equine massage benefit you, the horse owner?

There are three main topics: circulation, muscle performance, and mental acuity.

CIRCULATION: Massage increases circulation to all body parts. All cells of the body absolutely must have oxygen and nutrients brought to them, via the circulation of blood, to generate new cells, produce energy, export toxins and maintain all cellular functions. Poor circulation leads to a decrease in each of these areas. In essence, you now are working with a half-baked horse that will most likely have varied health issues.

MUSCLE PERFORMANCE: Massage physically breaks down the knots and contracted muscle fibers that cannot do their job efficiently. This leads to better muscle quality and more comprehensive and balanced muscle action. Your horse is made up of 700 skeletal muscles and that is 60% of the body mass of the horse! Working a horse with tight, continually contracted muscles is equivalent to operating in a state of resistance. The horse is using much more energy to perform and achieving less than its optimum potential and headed for injury.

MENTAL ACUITY: Massage speaks to the nervous system in such a way that a horse will experience a significant state of relaxation, mental clarity and self-healing. A horse functioning in a state of constant mental stress and limited focus will never perform to its full potential.

When massage is performed on a consistent basis the positive effects build upon themselves over time. Once a year massages are basically the equivalent of putting a band-aid on underlying issues and the horse never reaps the benefits of continual healing.

Regular massage not only benefits the horse, it also benefits you, the horse owner.

- You could experience a decrease in vet visits, which ultimately may keep your horse out of the lay-up stall saving you time and money.
- You may have a horse that can move more efficiently, with less pain and achieve more physically, which will equal a better performance for you.
- You may have a horse that experiences fewer tendon and ligament injuries equaling more performance time and less lay-up time; keeping you in the saddle.

These are just a few examples of what therapeutic massage may mean for you and your horse. As science evolves, so does our understanding of the benefits of massage therapy for different horses with their many uses.