



Integrating
manual therapies
into traditional
care for animals

Massage for Animals

FOR CENTURIES, ANIMALS HAVE given of themselves to serve mankind. They have been used for religious sacrifice, human consumption and education. They have performed as soldiers, laborers, entertainers and companions. Animals also have been the eyes and ears of disabled people, allowing them to function independently.

Recognizing the importance of animals to our daily lives, a growing number of professional therapists have developed an interest in joining forces with veterinarians to provide the most innovative health care techniques available. Today, professionals such as chiropractors, acupuncturists, naturopaths, physical therapists and massage therapists are part of the animal care team.

The techniques of CranioSacral Therapy, Visceral Manipulation and Mechanical Link (while developed for humans) can easily be used in combination with veterinary medicine.

CranioSacral Therapy (CST)

is a gentle, hands-on method of evaluating and enhancing the function of the craniosacral system. This physiological system consists of the membranes and fluids that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. Effective for a wide range of health problems associated with pain and dysfunction, CST enhances natural healing.

Visceral Manipulation (VM)

is a method of evaluation and treatment that consists of very delicate manual techniques that encourage the normal mobility and inherent tissue motion of the viscera and their connection to the rest of the body. Chronic tissue tensions - even minute adhesions - can stifle interconnected motion between all the organs, stressing the organs, their connective tissues, the nervous system and the musculoskeletal system.

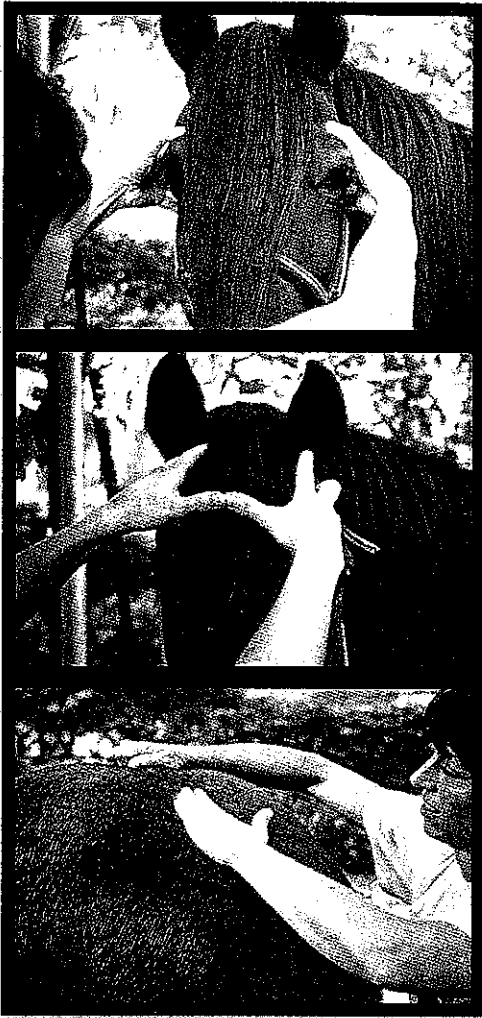
Mechanical Link

is a manual therapy that focuses on the fascial system to reduce structural tension throughout the body. The goal of Mechanical Link is to locate and alleviate the structural lesions within each anatomical system that cause and maintain tension in the entire body.

It is important to note that if you would like to work with animals other than your own, you should check the licensure laws in your state. We recommend teaming up with your local veterinarian. We also suggest communicating with the veterinarian of the animal you will be treating. He or she should be aware of and agree with the techniques you use. Most of the veterinarians we

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Manual Massage Techniques for Animals

The techniques of CranioSacral Therapy, Visceral Manipulation and Mechanical Link (while developed for humans) can easily be used in combination with veterinary medicine. Conditions that may cause a veterinarian to recommend one of these or other soft-tissue methods include:

- TMJ disorders, including bite problems, chewing complications, dental misalignment
- Recurring spinal dysfunction, which can be complicated by collars, halters and saddles
- Post-trauma / injuries, such as resolved leg problems that originate in another part of the body
- Post-operative rehabilitation, including neutering and tendon repair
- Post-illness recovery, addressing connective tissue response to inflammation and infection;
- Birthing complications
- Pain or arthritis

have worked with have been open to new ideas and problem-solving options.

Oregon veterinarian Donna M. Starita, D.V.M., has seen how manual therapies have benefited her patients. While not all veterinarians will be open to working with human therapists, Dr. Starita says more are becoming interested in this arrangement. She recommends approaching veterinarians and animal owners with information about how the manual techniques can help, then offer to work together.

Certainly, working with animals requires a unique approach. If you haven't been around animals all your life - maybe even if you have - we suggest that you spend time observing animal behavior. Gail Wetzler recalls that she learned a great deal by watching a mare interact with her colt. The way the mare nuzzled the colt had a particular rhythm that Gail was able to interpret after time. The nuzzling rhythm changed when the mare wanted the colt near or when she wanted time for herself.

When Alice Quaid works with a dog she doesn't know, she doesn't look directly in the eyes or put out her hand as if to pet it. Those could be interpreted as signs of aggression. The first time she worked on a horse, she stood next to the groomer and began touching his arm first. Next, she did some simple relaxation techniques for the groomer, as he relaxed so did the horse. At that point, Alice began to move into the horse's space, watching for the animal's reaction. She allowed the horse to smell her and then began to touch the horse.

To make an animal more comfortable to approach, it often is helpful to find a familiar place to conduct the therapy session and to have the owner hold the animal during the treatment.

Another important factor in working with animals is to develop sensitivity to their response to you and what you are doing. Therapy with animals has been compared to treating very young children - they can't tell you what they are feeling or ask you to stop what you are doing.

Gail has observed signals from animals during treatment indicating that they are processing the therapeutic changes. A horse licks its lips and a cat adjusts its ear direction, while a dog's eyes show these changes. All animals express changes through their breathing.

When working with animals, keep their environment in mind. What kind of stresses do they encounter? Are they confined in a small area? Observing animals in action and with their owners also can provide valuable information. Gail evaluated a horse that could only trot or canter with a left lead. After observing the owner on her horse, Gail discov-

ered that the rider had scoliosis. The horse had adapted its body to the rider's shifted weight.

While evaluating a hunter/jumper, Alice detected a tremendous twist in the horse's body from the left front leg to the right hind leg. The groomsmen stated that the horse had been gelded a few weeks ear-

lier, and that it was having difficulty clearing the jumps with the hind leg. Using CranioSacral Therapy techniques, Alice released the twist. The horse then was able to take the jumps more smoothly and began winning ribbons.

Gail treated a dog post hysterectomy after the owner noticed that her pet could

no longer jump up into bed. Gail found scar tissue creating a tension pattern toward the dog's left kidney, which caused soft tissue restrictions in the lower spine. This inhibited the dog's lower extremities and her ability to leap. The problems were easily corrected with manual therapy.

Working with veterinarians to help animals recover from injuries provides many rewards. Animals are precious to the wholeness of our world. Any help we can provide them is a blessing to us all.

References:

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Healing Your Horse - Alternative Therapies by Sharon Willoughby, D.V.M., D.C.
Physical Therapy and Massage for the Horse by Denoix/Philloux
The Holistic Equine (Wild Horse Enterprises - video)
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Beating Muscle Injury by Jack Meagher, M.T.

Alice Quaid, P.T., is a member of the clinical staff at The Upledger Institute, Inc. HealthFlex Clinical Services in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. Alice is a certified instructor for The Upledger Institute's CranioSacral Therapy for Pediatrics course. She holds a bachelor of science in physical therapy from Louisiana State University Medical Center and a bachelor of arts in psychology from Southeastern Louisiana University. She has used CranioSacral Therapy in the care of horses and dogs since 1993.

Gail Wetzler, P.T., C.V.M.I., E.S.M.T., is an equine sports massage therapist and a physical therapist in private practice in Newport Beach, California. Gail also is the director of Mechanical Link curriculum for The Upledger Institute as well as a certified Visceral Manipulation instructor. She also has served on the steering committee for Veterinary Physical Therapy for the American Physical Therapy Association, and currently is a member of the committee for the 1999 International Symposium on Rehabilitation and Veterinary Medicine.

Gail, along with Susan Crawford, D.C., and Donna M. Starita, D.V.M., are the instructors for Integrative Therapies in Animal Health, a four-day workshop exploring new ways in which manual therapy can play a role in veterinary medicine.

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