

Massaging Your Own Dog or Horse

Many of us understand there is therapeutic value in massaging our dogs and horses, yet others still see it as just a luxury. Though it releases endorphins and oxytocin in our bodies - the chemicals that make us "feel good" - it is far from the only feature. This article will summarize some of the key areas massage helps and speak to its therapeutic benefits. You will learn that massage is not just petting or grooming your animal. Though these things are nice and beneficial, they do not have the same impact. Also, petting or grooming your dog/horse rarely, if ever causes injury or harm to them. Massage has many health benefits and impacts every area of the body, but also if done incorrectly or at the wrong times, it could cause injury or harm.



Massage is the manipulation of soft tissue – muscles, tendons, ligaments - that impacts the *entire* physiology of the animal including:

- Organ function
- Immune system
- Circulatory system
- Soft tissue
- Digestive system
- Reproductive system
- Mental, emotional and physical state
- Endocrine system

Massage not only helps maintain the health of the animal by boosting their immune system, but can aid in healing of injuries and help manage degenerative diseases. While massage is highly beneficial when dealing with swelling, open sores, injuries, and degenerative diseases, each case needs to be treated uniquely and carefully to promote healing. Also, the less tangible aspects of

the animal's being, their mental and emotional state, also needs to be taken into account when performing massage.

There are times to do-it-yourself and other times when it would be of benefit to seek out professional help, or better yet, combine the two to give your dog the most help. It is understandable that people want to massage their own animals. A few strokes here and there over major muscles definitely can help the animal simply because their circulation increases in those areas. Often, as a practitioner, I teach people techniques and exercises to do at home with their animal companion. Active stimulation between professional therapy sessions can either expedite healing or help maintain the animal's health.

When you have a healthy and active dog/horse, most often a do-it-yourself massage will be enjoyable, feel good and your dog/horse will get some therapeutic benefit. Keep in mind it is important to know how much pressure to use, where the animal should be massaged and how stretching exercises are performed. If there done improperly, pain, discomfort and injury can occur. Here are some things to consider when contemplating massaging your dog/horse yourself:

- If the animal is pregnant, massage can induce labor. It's important to know where these triggers are to either avoid them or help induce labor at the appropriate time.
- Massage can spread infection and disease internally as well as contaminate other animals or people.
- Improper techniques can cause pain and injury.
- Trained professionals work on the animals on a regular basis and understand how to preventing soft tissue injuries during massage and at detecting issues.

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- Clients often relay to me that they intend to massage their dog/horse, but do not make appropriate time to follow through and do it. Be intentional and set an appointment to help manage your time.
- Understanding how often to massage is a key factor to influencing the health of the dog. A professional animal massage therapist can identify an appropriate schedule, whether it is to help the dog heal from an injury, manage pain or set up a preventative maintenance plan..
- No massage is the same. Learning proper techniques are critical as is knowing when it is appropriate to use a given stroke, how deep of pressure, where to focus and for how long all change every single massage.
- A massage practitioner can help direct you on what to do between appointments: acupressure, stretching, massage techniques, icing/heat, essential oil or topical applications, level of activity etc. are all modalities and tools that Animal Intuition is trained to help you on.
- Understanding the body language and signs the dog gives you is important. It helps to identify sore areas, when the animal wants more pressure, less pressure, how much time to spend in an area, sensitivities, and more. This is learned and honed by experience working with a variety of the animals on a regular basis.
- One must know what the contraindications and how to recognize these signs. A trained practitioner will know the signs, symptoms and question the history and condition of the animal before proceeding with a massage.



Each case needs to be evaluated to determine the best course of action. No massage is the same. Each animal responds differently and needs different things at different times. Hormones, work out schedules, activity level, interaction with their pack, age and their overall health all factor into how the animal responds to the therapy and what is appropriate to do during a session.

Massage can be used in conjunction with rehabilitation therapy, chiropractic adjustments and on its own. It is a healing therapy that boosts the dog's/horse's immune system. It is a routine part of an athlete's preventative maintenance program because of how it helps their body regenerate, heal and maintain proper function. Massage is far more than a luxury only for the privileged or those wanting to give their dog a special gift. It is beneficial to every animal, provided they do not have any contraindications present at the time.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact a local massage therapist or animal wellness practitioner like myself to work with you and your animals.



About Animal Intuition

Products and services to help maintain the health and provide healing for animals through the use of: animal communication, canine and equine massage therapy, Reiki, acupressure, Raindrop Technique[®], aromatherapy using Young Living therapeutic-grade essential oils. For more information contact Jenny Gott, CMTA, (952) 484-4396, Info@animal-intuition.com or visit www.animal-intuition.com.