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**EQUINE SPORTS
MASSAGE THERAPY**

What is Massage Therapy

Equine Sports Massage Therapy Is an Intellectual Process, working upon the law of ' Cause & Effect', not only releasing the causes of pain and discomfort from within the horse, it also helps prevent their consequential and future effects. Equine massage therapy reveals many techniques, applications and routines, all designed to produce targeted results, including, pre-competition, post- competition, maintenance, recovery, psychological relaxation and calming, physiological stimulation as well as muscular flexion and tone.

Massage therapy benefits the horse as follows

Massage Therapy increases the removal of:

- Built up toxins
- Built up waste
- Built up lactic acid
- Excess fluid

Maintains the horses:

- Nervous system
- Digestive system
- Body temperature
- Cranial rhythm
- Respiratory tract
- Proprioceptive sense

Enhances:

- Limb retraction
- Limb adduction
- Neck flexion and extension
- Back flexion and extension
- Impulsion, collection and extension
- Stride length

The Effects Massage Therapy has on the Horse

Massage has physical effects in that it strengthens and tones various components of the Locomotory System. The locomotory system is a term which describes the various parts of the body, which enables the horse to move from one place to another.

More than 60% of the horse's body weight is muscle. Small muscle injuries may take a few months to become apparent, by which time they have caused more serious injury. Prompt attention to those "minor" muscle injuries not only enhances a horse's performance but may prevent future problems. Muscle tightening is transmitted from one muscle group to another so, for example, shoulder tension may be transmitted to the muscles of the forearm, resulting in extra stress being placed on the tendons. Muscles may also over-enlarge with tension.

Injury is a major reason for horses and their riders being unable to enjoy a full working life together. The most common injuries are

- Soft tissue injuries (i.e. not bone, but commonly tendon or ligament injuries).
- Degenerative problems (excessive damage to the bones or joints between the bones which progresses over time, such as arthritis).

The causes of injuries are nearly always multi-factorial i.e. there are lots of reasons for the injury, not one clear cause.

Muscles that are tight or in a contracted state put pressure on surrounding tissues, this causes a decrease in blood circulation, restricted movement, nerve irritation and pain. If not relieved and loosened this tightness can cause more problems and will continue to worsen.

4) Muscle Atrophy

3) Reduction of Circulation

5) Ligament Strain

2) Muscle Spasm

Injury Cycle

6) Loss of Movement

1) Pain

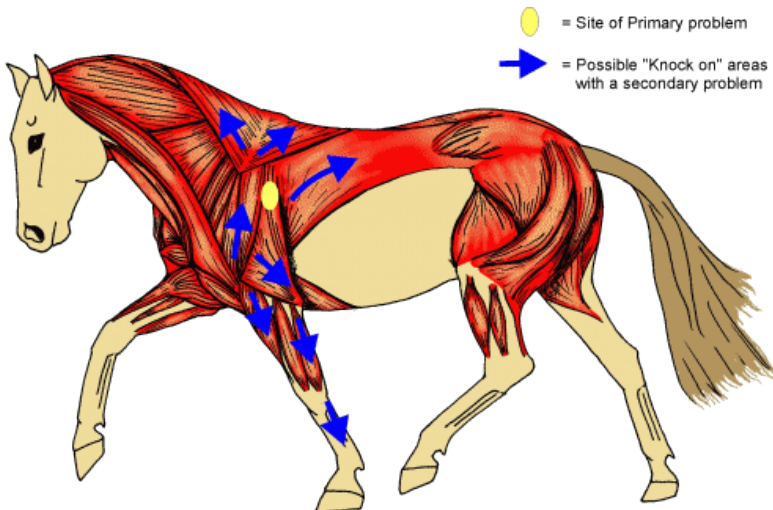
7) Adhesions

Initial Injury

By reducing:

(2) - Muscle spasm, via appropriate therapy, there is no (3) reduction in circulation, resulting in little (4) muscle atrophy thus causing minimal (5) ligament strain which means no (6), loss of movement or (7) adhesions or (8) pain therefore enabling recovery.

Therefore, a site of muscular injury can occur in an area, but it can consequently have a knock on effect with other muscle groups around the initial site of injury.



Procedure

Conformation and gait analysis - Head, neck, back, limbs and feet through the following

- ❖ Static Evaluation
- ❖ Dynamic Evaluation
- ❖ Ridden Evaluation

Assessment

- ❖ The horses' acceptance to be touched
- ❖ Initial identification of soreness/tension

Treatment

- ❖ With use of the various strokes and techniques, treatment of areas identified in the assessment takes place.

Aftercare

- ❖ Follow up exercises

Conclusion

Massage Therapy can aid many problems, conditions, injuries and wounds:

- Screening for potential problems
 - Following injury to speed up recovery
 - Compensatory problems
 - Back pain secondary to stifle OCD, hock
 - DJD, kissing spine, pelvic asymmetry
 - Adaptive gait due to primary lameness
 - Muscle imbalance, muscle atrophy
 - Poor performance, stiffness on one rein, disunited in canter
 - Post surgery
 - Pain management
 - Improve range of movement after immobilisation (box rest)
 - Rehabilitation of gait pattern
 - Exercise rehabilitation
 - Soft tissue injury
 - Muscle spasm, bruising
 - Wounds
 - Tendon and ligament injury
 - Saddle related problems

Equine Sports Massage Q and A

Do I need my vets permission?

Yes. By law you must seek your vets' permission prior to booking a Sports Massage Therapy session.

Does my horse need a massage?

Horses can suffer muscular discomfort for a number of reasons. Often it is due to muscle fatigue from over-exertion which can lead to compensatory pain and further physiological complications. We all suffer aches and pains at some time in our life and horses are similar. However, horses can't speak and we must learn to interpret the signs. These include changes in normal behaviour in the paddock, on the yard or stable and a reduced performance whilst working. Physical signs may interpret themselves as abnormally worn shoes or changes in condition. Competition horses are naturally more prone to muscle discomfort but all horses including leisure and the family pony can all benefit from regular massage sessions.

How long is a session?

The initial session can last up to 3 hours and includes a thorough assessment of the horse looking at conformation and its way of going with and/or without the rider (and sometimes the rider), follow on sessions can last for approximately 1 ½ hours.

How much does it cost?

Each session costs £40 each.

Will a notice an improvement?

In some cases an immediate improvement can be noticed, but don't be disheartened if you don't it may take a few sessions until you notice an improvement.

How often should my horse be massaged?

The frequency of sessions can depend on the horses health, the type of injury, its level of work, its conformation, the age of the horse and a variety of reasons. Horses in regular competition or hard work can benefit from massage sessions as often as every 2 weeks, where as horses competing at local or riding club level would benefit from a massage session once a month or a hack may only need a session every 6 weeks as part of a maintenance program. It is important that you remember that prevention is better than cure.

How long do I have to wait before I can ride my horse post massage?

This would depend on what the massage session has revealed as a sound health horse can be ridden after a session, although proper follow-up exercise is an important component of sports massage, in some cases it is advised to allow the horse at least a days rest depending on the amount of work carried out during the session.



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