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## Assignment Week 7

**Equine massage** is a topic of increasing importance in horse care and is my chosen alternative therapy. Professional and recreational horse owners use it to improve performance, increase mobility and range of motion, and free up the horse's poll, neck, shoulders and back to improve jumping, bending, turning, and stopping. Owners who learn equine massage can also learn how to use touch, and the horse's response to touch, to open a new avenue of communication with the horse.

Equine massage is a small investment in the horse's health. Massage causes the muscles to fill with rich oxygenated blood flow and increases circulation; which hastens the elimination of wastes and toxic buildup from fatigued muscles. Alleviation of muscle tension and spasms can naturally increase the horse's efficiency. Removing harmful toxins from muscles and joints increases the flexibility, muscle tone, range of motion and enhances competitive performance.

By using a consistent massage therapy regime, you can improve your horse's performance, confidence and overall quality of life. Not only does massage improve its performance and health it can also be used to help the horse relax. If a horse is very stressed out or jumpy, massage normally will help relax the stressed horse and it helps improve the confidence of a jumpy one. Massage can help the horse and handler bond.

How do you know when to provide a massage?

### **Does he:**

- Nip, kick, put his ears back or move away when you approach with a saddle?
- Refuse to stand still or dip his back when being mounted?
- Stumble, exhibit stiffness or lack of bend?
- Have short, choppy or uneven strides or keep changing leads in canter?
- Rush or stop at fences normally happily cleared?
- Buck or rear uncharacteristically?

### **Do you:**

- Constantly have to push your horse to walk out more?
- Have difficulty getting your horse to engage and work in an outline?

If so, it may be that he has some soft tissue muscle, tendon and ligament injury, muscle tension, stiffness or soreness.

Through the manipulation of these soft tissues, massage can be used to enhance his flexibility and suppleness and hence improve performance.

Because I have no personal knowledge of massage therapy, I read several online cases to provide the following studies.

### **Case Number 1**

Harry is a quarter horse gelding, 15.1hh, age 10, and has no documentation prior to it's original owner. When first introduced to Harry, his body was locked on the left lead from years of roping and being asked to move his body in the same way over and over again, a hard former life. His owners indicated he could not take the right lead, whether it be on his own out in the pasture or under saddle. He has large white spots on his withers, testament to his ill-fitting tack. His left scapula was rotated forward. He had many adhesions in his right jaw due to poor teeth and having to chew on only once side of his mouth, along with many knots and severe hypertension through his neck. His legs were crooked, his toes very long, and he didn't have much range of motion in his hind end. He also carried about 75% of his weight on the front end rather than the average 60%.

It would take the efforts of professionals from many different disciplines to get him back on the right track. Through natural equine dentistry, natural hoof trimming, and equine massage, Harry is well on his way to a more balanced body and mind. After only a few sessions early on in his therapy, we saw huge improvements. He was even able to pick up a right lead in the round pen at liberty after our second bodywork session.

#### **Before**



#### **After**



Note above the slight toe in of the left front leg and slight toe out of the right front leg in the before picture (above left). Even though his left foot is somewhat back and to the side from his body in this photo, even squared up, this was indicative of how he held his left front leg all the time, regardless of leg position. The after picture (above right), taken nearly six months after the before picture, shows considerable improvement in both legs.



Above you can see the extremely long toes of the front feet. This is putting an increased strain on all the structures of the back of the forelegs and forearms (tendons, ligaments and muscles). This hoof configuration causes the structures on the front of the legs to shorten and the back of the leg to lengthen, causing excessive strain to the back of the leg and making the structures more prone to injury. This horse would exhibit good extension at the trot, but very poor flexion due to the shortening of muscles, tendons and ligaments on the front of the legs.

Harry's right hip/pelvis was tilted slightly higher on the right side than the left as well. After a combination of massage and chiropractic adjustment to his pelvis and hips, this has been completely corrected now. Before these adjustments, Harry was unable to lift either back leg comfortably onto a hoof stand for the trimming. Now he has no problems with bringing either rear leg forward and up for trimming.

As mentioned above, Harry's pelvis was slightly tilted. It was causing huge problems for Harry in being able to pick up the correct lead on the back end and get a nice smooth extended trot. He is now learning to use his back end correctly again the owners have noticed a big difference in his ability to lift and round his back. He can now flex his ribs in either direction quite comfortably. Harry still has issues that need to be addressed with his teeth. Unfortunately with teeth, change comes slowly as they have a slow rate of growth and doing too much is just as bad, and often times worse, than not doing enough. He continues to have some issues with both vertical and lateral flexion due to this. He is scheduled to have more dental work done later this fall and we have high hopes that he will overcome these few remaining issues once his teeth are in proper balance again. Harry now is able to pick up the right lead without cross-

firing and is comfortably trotting under saddle. He continues to show amazing improvement with each session and is like a completely different horse.

## **Case Number 2**



In this case, a Quarab gelding, 14.2hh, age 5 in the above photo, had an injury to his left shoulder as a yearling. In an effort to relieve the pain and discomfort in the affected limb, he began shifting his weight over to the opposite side. The muscles involved in lifting the limb have become severely hypertensive and the left front hoof began displaying more upright growth, while the weighted hoof began to flare out in the years following the injury. This horse, although not completely lame, displays limited range of motion in the injured shoulder and a slight favoring of the limb during the weight bearing step. The original farrier (owner has since switched to a natural barefoot trim farrier), in an effort to correct the hoof angles had been trying to drop the heel down. However, because of the limited range of motion in the limb/shoulder, this would cause the horse to go very noticeably lame for a period of time following the trim, and of course because of the weight distribution, the heel continued to grow faster than the toe, creating a cycle of imbalance.

An equine masseuse was brought in to work with the farrier to help restore balance to this horse. The same day of the farrier appointment, the masseuse worked over the affected muscle groups to help them relax and stretch further than they had been able to on their own. After discussing the issues with the farrier, it was decided the best course of action would be to trim the heel in small increments and come back more often in order to help the horse's body adjust to the changes gradually. After this first visit, the owner indicated that the horse did not go lame following the trim like he usually did and seemed much more comfortable. The farrier and the masseuse continued to work together as a team

on this horse for several months and by doing so have accomplished more together than we could have done on our own.

Identifying these imbalances early is crucial to successfully treating the problem before a more serious problem and/or injury can occur. If you suspect your horse's abnormal hoof growth may be due to an imbalance in the body, consult with your equine healthcare team to help identify the problem and develop an appropriate treatment program. Good communication between your equine health care professionals (veterinarian, farrier, and dentist) will assure the development of a treatment program that will provide your horse with the best chance of a successful return to balance.

Over a period of about six months, with regular bi-monthly trimming and bodywork, this horse no longer goes lame after trimming, shows greatly increased range of motion in the affected limb, and according to the owner is much more comfortable overall. They have since been able to decrease the frequency of trims and bodywork. The owner has also switched to Natural Hoof Care Practitioner.

As evidenced in the most recent photos, while the front hooves still show a slight imbalance, there is considerable improvement in the growth pattern overall as the horse has been able to more evenly distribute its weight. More work still needs to be done, but he is well on the road to a more balanced body.



### **Case Number 3**

Rocky is a Morgan, 14.2hh, 4 years old. This case was successful because of Rocky's strong will. On a particular day, he did not want to work. His trainer fought with him a bit, ended the session and put him up. Hours later, the owner was hand walking him and noticed as he grazed he was spreading his front legs like a foal. The next day he was almost doing the splits and his neck looked very straight and tight. She called the vet right away. He did the necessary things for tying up and muscle strain but nothing helped. He suspected Cervical Strain. Rocky went down hill fast. As a four year old Rocky was very fit – the owner had

been driving him since the age of two. He always had lots of energy. So what he was reduced to in such a short time was agonizing for the owner. The vet and the owner consulted and had Rocky examined by many professionals, but no one was quite sure what was going on. There were several possibilities - cervical strain, EPM, Wobblers' Syndrome, or ??? Had he played too rough with one of his friends or was it the unyielding hands of his trainer that day? There was no cost affective way of knowing. So it was treated as a cervical strain. The owner had already treated him for EPM to no avail. And the other possibilities offered no real cure. If he was going to get well, only time and TLC was going to have to do it. Rocky was a trooper; he suffered through all the poking and prodding. Within weeks his muscles atrophied and he was reduced to what you see in the picture below. He could not raise or lower his head. He had the heart to survive. At times, in the pasture, the owner would find him on his knees (like a goat) eating. He received regular massage. The massage therapist taught the owner how to work on him on a daily basis, which saved money. It wasn't until months later, when they came across an Alternative "Chiropractor / Acupuncturist / Veterinarian", when the healing process began. Chinese Herbs, Acupuncture and Massage worked together to bring Rocky back to life. Today he is what you see in all my advertising. His body is a true testament of what Alternative methods can accomplish. Rocky is back Jumping, Dressage and his favorite; Long Distant Trail. He still gets massaged every week whether he needs it or not and loves every minute of it.

