

Massage and Muscles

By Camilla Engfelt

Both horses and humans often have muscle problems and tense muscles. 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, stiffness and pain. If not relieved and loosened this tightness can cause more problems and will continue to worsen.

Massage therapy is one of the ways to free up tight muscle tissue, release muscle tension and enhance blood circulation.

Muscle tension can be caused by stress, wrong work, bad equipment (often saddle), overwork / overloading, skeleton or inner pain, punches, injuries, environment, monotonic / static work etc.

Many people today suffer from pain in shoulders, neck and back related to tense and overloaded muscles. This is the most common reason for illness in Sweden today. This is often work related.

Our horses' problems are also often related to how we work them and sour back is a very common problem of riding horses today. This can be caused by a badly suited saddle, the rider himself or how we work them.

Remember that horses are sensitive animals and can feel if we are stressed, irritated or tense. **A tense, unbalanced, unhappy and irritated rider will never get a happy, relaxed horse.**

So if horse and rider should be able to perform their best and be in harmony, it is very important to be able to work relaxed and without tension.

We set high demands on ourselves and our horses today. And to perform our best we have to take care of our bodies. The body needs variety of training, balanced food, rest, (recovery) and good equipment to develop in a good way.

The horse is our biggest athlete and is used as a sportsman in many different disciplines.

More than 60% of the horse's body weight is muscle and the horse has over 700 skeleton muscles!

Humans consist of around 400 skeleton muscles which make up 40 % of our weight.

We have muscles everywhere. Muscular problems can be a frustrating source of a variety of motion problems and training set-backs.

Human athletes have used massage for many years to prevent injuries and increase their ability. Massage can be used both before and after a hard training or competition.

Massage has many positive effects on our own and our horses' bodies:

- Relaxes muscle spasm
- Improves muscle tone

- Reduces congestion within blood and lymph vessels
- Stimulates or relaxes the nervous system
- Increases excretion of fluids
- Increases the exchange of substances between cells
- Encourages tissue repair
- Stretches connective tissue
- Helps maintain flexibility
- Reduces inflammation of tissue in joints as well as enhances nutritional aspects
- Prevents the formation of adhesions and fibrous bands in muscles, tendons and ligaments
- Increases intestinal movement
- Stimulates glands
- Helps clean pores

Most of us are quick to accuse a horse of being un-genuine, uncooperative, impolite or even dangerous when they may be in pain. This pain can be caused by muscle tensions or other problems that leads to tense muscles.

In the performance horse, massage enables the horse to compete to its full potential by increasing circulation, enhancing muscle tone, relaxing muscle spasm and increasing the range of movement. Massage also helps to prevent injury. In the non-competition horse, massage can benefit the well-being of the animal, release tension and aid mental relaxation.

Massage can be useful for:

- Horses recovering from lameness. Horses with reduced performance may also benefit from equine massage.
- Assisting in returning the muscles and joints to full flexibility.
- Benefiting competition horses as part of a warm up program. Massage is also of enormous benefit after competing when used as part of a warm down program.
 - Movement problems



Massage is one of the oldest, simplest forms of therapy and is a system of stroking, pressing and kneading different areas of the body to relieve pain, relax, stimulate, and tone the body. Massage does much more than create a pleasant sensation on the skin, it also works on the soft tissues (the muscles, tendons, and ligaments) to improve muscle tone. Although it largely affects those muscles just under the skin, its benefits may also reach the deeper layers of muscle and possibly even the organs themselves. Massage also stimulates blood circulation and assists the lymphatic system (which runs parallel to the circulatory system), improving the elimination of waste throughout the body.

The Effects of Massage

Although a single massage will be enjoyable, the effects of massage are cumulative and a course of massage treatments will bring the most benefits. Regular massage can have the effect of strengthening and toning the entire body mechanism, and so helps to prevent unnecessary strains and injuries that



might otherwise occur due to excess tension and any resulting structural weaknesses. Massage can stimulate or calm the nervous system - depending upon what is required by the individual - and thus helps reduce fatigue, leaving the receiver with a feeling of replenished energy. At its best, massage has the potential to restore the individual physically, mentally and spiritually.

Massage is not a solution for everything and does not replace veterinary treatment, but can be used as a complement or to treat muscular problems. Lameness can be caused by muscle problems, but also by a joint inflammation, inner pain or bad shoeing. Therefore it is important to find the reason for the problem and try to prevent the problems from coming back again. But pain always affects the muscles by causing tension.

It is also important to prevent muscle tension by strengthening the muscles, working ergonomically, stretching and relaxing. A good balance between work and rest, good equipment, various forms of training on different ground, balanced food, massage and stretching create the best opportunities for a healthy and longer life! It is also important to warm up and cool down before and after training.

See the whole picture!

Everything hangs together. The muscles, the skeleton and the joints work together to create motion. If the muscles don't work we can't move, but the *muscles work together with the rest of the body!*

