

## Find The Right Therapy For Your Horse

By Kathy Duncan

There are thousands of modalities available to a Therapist to use on many thousands of injuries and diseases. Most people aren't educated in the uses of all of them. Often, a client will say that they "have tried everything," but their horse is still lame. I wonder what *everything* includes.

Have they tried Myofascial Release, Acupuncture, Chinese Herbs, Chiropractic, Neuromuscular Therapy, Reiki, Deep Tissue Massage, Aromatherapy, and Hydrotherapy? Generally, the answer is no.

Each modality can address one little thing that the others cannot. Also, each body responds differently according to the indication. I've seen horses respond really well to Aromatherapy or Chinese Herbs when all else has failed. Chinese therapies, after all, have been used with positive results for thousands of years. In addition, each modality will address a different pathology or part of the body or mind that another does not.

Yes, sometimes the representative of a certain therapy can be strange. I understand that a typical 60 year old cowboy isn't going to attend an energy healing workshop on behalf of his horse. That's why it's up to a motivated Horse Therapist to sort through the riff raff on behalf of your client and his horse.

My personal preference is Sports Massage. I like to give and receive it. My background and core education is in muscles. If your muscles are flexible, and have adequate blood flow, they will function properly, and adjoining joints will not have stress placed on them. There are, however, always special circumstances when it comes to chronic pain syndromes. Sometimes the cause needs to be addressed, other times the mind causes the stress that can affect the organs. When Sports Massage doesn't bring relief, and the attending Veterinarian has used up his bag of tricks, sometimes a Therapist needs to research further.

The modalities that I've listed below can be researched on behalf of your horse, but a human will benefit from the variety of choices, as well. It is important to consult with the horse's Vet, and to check references and required certification or licensing before using any Therapist. Most Certifications or Licensing Boards require practitioners to carry Liability Insurance, so it's not inappropriate to request proof of insurance before hiring a Practitioner. In fact, it is recommended. If they don't carry insurance, it's likely that they are not properly certified.

Myofascial Release Therapy: In many cases, fascia becomes stuck over an area of the body. This can be caused by scarring, or by chronic inflammation. A lot of sport horses have this condition over the rump area, specifically, the Gluteus and Bicep Femoris areas. It is somewhat like placing plastic wrap over the kitchen counter. In this case, you can slip your hand under one end of it to peel it up. In an enclosed body part, the release must be achieved without slipping your hand under one end.

Myofascial Release Therapy is a technique that requires a sustained hold against the tissue to cause it to release from the outside. This therapy is beneficial in areas that have been stuck for

some time. It can bring great relief, add to mobility, and prevent further injury to nearby joints. An expert book on the subject is called *Release The Potential* by Doris Halstead. There is also a great video course for Equine Therapists by Mark Barnes.

Acupuncture: It's as old as the hills. For over 2000 years, Acupuncture has been practiced for pain relief, disease, and anything health related. Animals respond well to Acupuncture where a fine, hair like needle is inserted into points on the body that correspond to meridians relative to the organs. I've seen many cases where acute and chronic pain has been relieved through the use of acupuncture. You shouldn't necessarily wait until nothing else works to try Acupuncture because it can improve the overall well being of a body. If you want your horse to be generally well, an Acupuncture treatment can do just that. Acupuncture is governed by each state, and practitioners are required to be licensed. It is not unusual to find a Veterinarian that is a licensed Acupuncturist. That's the perfect scenario.

Equine Acupressure is based on the same principles as Acupuncture, except the finger is used to place pressure on a point rather than a needle. There are many qualified teachers and schools around the world in this modality. I highly recommend *Equine Acupressure, A Working Manual* by Soderberg, Zidonis, and Snow. There is an accompanying poster showing the meridians, and these women teach their well-researched methods worldwide.

Chinese Herbs: If you've found a Veterinary Acupuncturist, they are usually an educated Herbalist, as well. This is important because not only is the equine digestive system unique, but some herbs can be toxic if not properly administered.

Herbs are very effective when used as poultices as they can draw heat from an area. They are also effective in relief of pain, relaxation, allergies, and digestive ailments. Be sure that you consult with a qualified expert before using Chinese herbs on your animals or yourself.

Chiropractic: Based on the principles that a structural imbalance can lead to internal disease by way of disturbance to the nervous system. Treatment includes manipulation of soft tissue, the spine, and other joints to bring the rest of the body back to normal function. Most Chiropractors also work with nutrition and other behaviors that affect overall health and wellness. Generally, a Chiropractor will massage the soft tissue around the problem area before persuading a joint to move back into balance.

Chiropractic was one of the first alternative or complimentary therapies accepted in the modern Equine world even though The American Medical Association called Chiropractic an "unscientific cult" and boycotted it until losing a 1987 antitrust case.

A modern Chiropractor must be licensed as a Veterinarian or a Human Chiropractor before attaining a license to perform treatments on horses. Like Acupuncture, it is not uncommon to find a Veterinarian that is also a licensed Equine Chiropractor. Be sure to confirm that a person has the proper qualifications to perform a manipulation on your horse.

Chiropractic treatments have been proven to bring substantial relief to a subject with spine and other joint subluxations.

Neuromuscular Therapy: Commonly known as *Trigger Point Therapy*, this therapy is applied to specific areas of pain. An important part of this therapy is that the client tells you if a point refers

pain to another area of the body. Of course, a horse can't communicate this verbally, but an experienced Therapist will watch the ears or other areas of the body for flinching or tightening.

This type of treatment is used as both a diagnostic and therapeutic technique and there is now a Master's degree available in the Therapy. A powerful soft tissue technique, many experts that have researched other types of therapy have become involved in this ever evolving and powerful technique. The St. John Method is a popular method.

Reiki: Reiki is an ancient form of energy healing. A student must perfect and be attuned by a Reiki Master in 3 levels of Reiki before becoming a master himself. Reiki is an energy that brings love and positive thoughts. Although a silent, energetic therapy, horses respond very well to this ancient form of healing. As in the other therapies that I've mentioned, beware of unqualified practitioners.

Aromatherapy: The best way to describe how aroma can affect the body's endorphins is to remind you of a specific smell from childhood. Maybe the smell of your Grandmother's kitchen, the incense that was burned in your church, or the ground after a rainfall. A familiar smell can awaken parts of your brain that relate to wellness or even sadness. It is described as the limbic brain anchoring past experiences with certain aromas. Therefore, as with all therapy, the wrong oil can trigger a negative response so you should derive your therapy and advice from a qualified Aromatherapist.

Aromatherapy can be beneficial in horses with anxiety issues where drugs have not worked. Some credible resources for more information about this therapy are [www.aromaweb.com](http://www.aromaweb.com), [www.candledance.com](http://www.candledance.com), and [www.joellessacredgrove.com](http://www.joellessacredgrove.com).

The next time that your client tells you that they have tried everything, ask them again. There is a plethora of even more therapies to try!