



Alternative Muscular Treatments

By Jessica Blackwell – www.equestricare.com.au

In this day and age, every man and his dog has heard of “Horse Massage” as it is becoming very commonplace in a society that is currently striving to do the best for their horse. But what is horse massage? I know that if I go and get a massage they ask me if I would like deep tissue, reiki, craniosacral etc....No longer do we just talk about horse massage, we talk about a whole variety of alternative muscular treatments.

There are so many different ones if you choose to look carefully, but for the purpose of this article we will look at Bowen therapy, Equine Muscle Release Therapy, Myofascial Release, JENT and Craniosacral Therapy.

All of these treatment methods look at the horse as an individual and aim to heal the horses muscles using the practitioners hands, but they go about it in different ways. What makes these forms of therapy alternative is their work at the fascial level. Fascia is a three dimensional web that surrounds every bone, muscle, nerve, organ, and vessel down to the cellular level from head to foot or, head to hoof. It is comprised of elastin, collagen and a fluid ground substance. Restrictions can develop in fascia from trauma, poor posture and repetitive training. These restrictions can create pain, swelling, misalignments, poor muscular biomechanics, decreased range of motion, decreased strength and lameness. Fascia loses it's pliability, collagen becomes dense and fibrous and the ground substance can solidify. Standard tests will not show a fascial restriction.

One of the original forms of alternative muscular treatments was Myofascial Release. Myofascial Release was developed by John F Barnes for use on humans. The equine form was developed by his son Mark Barnes in the 90's.

Myofascial Release is a hands on, whole body manual therapy technique addressing the fascial system. MFR is used to elongate the fascial tissue with a 90-120 second gentle pressure into the restriction or tissue barrier. After releasing through several barriers the tissue will become soft and pliable. The pressure will be taken off pain sensitive areas and motion restored.

Bowen Therapy (originally developed by Tom Bowen for use on humans) is a gentle, non-intrusive therapy which stimulates, the body's inner ability to heal itself, and activate the reorganisation of the musculature of the body to bring increased energy levels and pain relief. As a soft tissue therapy, it 'disturbs' the fascia or connective tissue.

Similar to this is Equine Muscle Release Therapy (a form of Bowen therapy) which works on balancing the whole body and brain of the horse by working on the nervous system. Most of the EMRT bodywork is concentrated on connective tissue known as Fascia. Fascia can entrap nerves affecting the CNS (Central Nervous System). The CNS of the horse consists of the brain and spinal cord. It's like an "Information Highway" carrying messages to and from the body and brain. Any disfunction of the CNS and/or blockages in other parts of the body can also affect the involuntary nervous system. The

system controls bodily functions such as Digestion, Heart Rate, Bladder and Bowel Functions etc (<http://www.horsehealth.com.au/emrt.htm>)

Then in 1997 Jock (pioneer of the Vibromuscular Harmonization Technique (VHT)) and his wife Ivana Ruddock, developed Equine Touch, a form of bodywork similar to Bowen Therapy. Equine Touch is a non- diagnostic, non invasive Equine Bodywork system which addresses the connective soft tissue, fascia, muscle, and ligaments which works at a holistic level. Jock defines it as “a unique and very specific body balancing foundation consisting of a series of choreographed vibrational moves performed gently over precise points on the equines body. These moves are carried out in predetermined patterns, which when processed by the horse assists it to attain the ideal stat of homeostasis at all levels”.

Newest to the horse industry of today is JENT (Jenkins Equine Neurophysiologic Therapy) developed by Australian Di Jenkins. JENT is a unique bodywork therapy system based on Di's extensive research and data collected from several thousand case studies. Like Bowen, JENT works on the fascial system and other repetitive traumas that lead to temperament, behavioural and training problems resulting in reduced performance. The difference with JENT is that it works on patterns Di has discovered that are the primary cause of reduced posture, movement and behavioural/emotional disquiet, and addresses these patterns with the treatment which includes a combination of bodywork, red light therapy and myofascial release.

Slightly different to the others is CranioSacral Therapy. This form of therapy is becoming much better known these days. It is based on a number of findings about the body's subtle physiology, which were made by osteo- paths in the USA nearly 100 years ago. These findings show that every cell in a healthy body expresses a rhythmic movement which is fundamental to life – and which has been called craniosacral motion.

Equine CranioSacral (ECS) work is a holistic healing practice, which uses extremely light finger pressure to optimize body movement. When applied correctly, this gentle and subtle technique can be highly effective in addressing a number of conditions in the horse.

At the core of the body is the cerebrospinal fluid, which cushions the brain and spinal cord. The cerebrospinal fluid has an ebb and flow like motion to it, whereas other areas of the body follow their own movement pattern. This movement is so subtle that it is barely measurable, but trained therapist are able to perceive and subtly interact with it with their hands in a therapeutic way. This interaction brings about re-organisation and healing in the various tissues and systems as well as in the different layers of the body's energy field.

While having the unique ability to stand on their own as a form of therapy, one of the most valuable assets of the therapies described is their total compatibility to work in a complementary and harmonious synergy with many recognized equine healing modalities including acupuncture, homeopathy, herbs, Bach flower remedies, chiropractic, massage

and osteopathic. They are not only compatible with these equine therapies and styles of equine bodywork but with all types of equine address such as trimming, shoeing, saddle fitting and correction, balanced riding, training, rehabilitation and nutrition, all essential elements of influence in creating and maintaining stability and health in any horse.

