



# The magic of **massage**

Massage therapy benefits muscles and enhances every system of the body. It is a natural requirement of the body for all living creatures, dogs included.

By **Beth Parton\***

DOMESTIC DOGS are totally dependent on humans – eating, sleeping, exercising and generally sharing our lives. This bond is a vital part of both the animal and the owner's good health and well-being.

Dogs can feel the brunt of our fast and frantic modern lifestyles. They take on our stress and can become neurotic, timid, aggressive and ill. Many people hardly touch their dogs for various reasons. Some think, innocently, that the dog needs nothing more than the occasional pat or brushing.

But we expect so much from our dogs in return. These loyal companions need more than just a place to sleep, a walk when we have time and a pat on the head.

Because dogs can't tell us what is ailing them, they communicate through body language, cries or noises that we sometimes find hard to understand. Recognising when

an animal is in pain can be difficult because animals don't act the same way as people.

Sick dogs may still wag their tail when greeting people or they will find a way round a muscle or joint problem so they can function and stay an integral part of a family unit.

One needs to stand back and observe an animal for signs of pain and discomfort. Signs such as lack of activity, decreased appetite, weight loss, heavy breathing, restlessness, behaviour changes, licking, biting or rubbing the site of pain.

Interbreeding between dog types can lead to new physical and health problems. And although dogs look very different to humans, they share many of our body's characteristics. Since dogs share our lifestyles and often our diet, more are presenting with human-related diseases than previously.

Dog massage – Canine Myofunctional ▶

## Benefits of dog massage

### IT INCREASES

- Energy
- Socialisation
- Toxin release
- Oxygen to cells
- Blood circulation
- Bone density and muscle mass
- Removal of metabolic waste products from body
- Clearance of lymphatic system and node groups
- Endurance in exercise and work situations
- Flexibility
- Muscle tone
- Trust and bonding
- Nutrition to tissues
- Range of movement
- Performance
- Relaxation

### IT DECREASES

- Pain/soreness
- Blood pressure
- Muscle tension/stiffness
- Inflammation and swelling in joints
- Recovery time after injury or surgery
- Stress
- Anxiety and fear

### OTHER PLUSES

- Helps maintain the whole body in better physical condition.
- Rehydration of the fascia and releases "sticky points".
- Improves elasticity of muscle fibres and lengthens connective tissue.
- Improved blood circulation affects the entire body

- including nerves, organs and muscles so they can operate better and promotes the natural healing cycle to take place.
- Breaks down scar tissue, calcium deposits, adhesions, fibrosis and spasms in muscles.
- Boosts immune system, maintaining dog's vitality.
- Helps an aged dog to feel better, more comfortable and gives relief from aches and pains.
- Dogs are calmer, happier, more alert, active and responsive.
- Releases endorphins that work as the body's natural painkiller and provides a feeling of well-being.
- It helps and benefits young dogs as they learn to feel comfortable with people touching their paws, making it easier for nail clipping and grooming.
- Massaging their gums helps promote circulation and healthy teeth growth.
- Relieves pain from arthritis, hip dysplasia and other ailments.
- Alleviates stress caused by separation anxiety, vet or grooming visits, boarding kennels stays, earlier abuse and loss of another family pet.
- Massage helps to warm up the body, improve performance and reduce risk of injury especially for show, agility and sports dogs.

► Therapy (CMT) – can be something that is given as a treat, to ease distress, boost general health and well-being, for behavioural adjustment or for more serious health problems.

Massage therapy does not take the place of professional veterinary care but some great results can be achieved when veterinary science, therapeutic massage and natural health therapies work side by side.

CMT practitioners work mostly on the fascia and superficial groups of muscles that are mainly for movement. They will look for muscles that have indicators of a trauma, blow or injury, posture that is not balanced, poor diet, incorrect preparation before exercise or muscles cooling down too quickly after exercise, or not getting enough exercise. They also look at joints being too close together, or not aligned, or with a tendon/ligament tear. There may be a dislocation, fracture and/or muscle shortening.

All these factors can contribute to problems and disorders in muscles and joints. Some injuries may be long term and have become chronic. All can cause painful, rigid muscles which affect nerves and result in behavioural problems.

Dog owners are becoming more aware of the importance of looking after their pet's health and the reflected part that can play on their own health and well-being.

With therapeutic dog massage, expert understanding, patience and care by a qualified CMT practitioner, these and other problems may be improved and in some cases overcome.

### CMT TECHNIQUES

A number of very specific strokes and techniques are used for different reasons. This can also depend on the animal's health, condition, age, ailment and reason for the massage.

A massage will include a variety of techniques tailored to each individual dog including effleurage, compression, friction, trigger point, kneading, rolling, acupressure, lymphatic drainage, reiki, myofascial release and limb, neck and body stretches.

### TREATMENT TIME

Depends on age, ailments, health and reason for the massage. It is important not to rush the massage and



not to take the length of the treatment longer than the dog is comfortable with.

Look for both positive and negative reactions and body signals from the animal. Some dogs accept the hands-on therapy very easily from the first treatment. Others need several short introductory sessions before relaxing into the massage.

### POST-MASSAGE

At the end of the massage, ensure your dog has plenty of water available. Take it for a short walk and ensure you give the dog plenty of opportunity to go to the toilet.

Your dog may want to take a nap

soon after the massage and you may find it sleeps better and wakes up more relaxed, happier and less stressed due to a decrease of pain. You may notice it has a better range of movement and enjoys exercise more.

### CONTRAINDICATIONS

Occasionally there are underlying health issues when it may not be ideal to massage. A qualified CMT practitioner, if concerned after taking a medical history, may suggest you call your vet for clearance to continue with further appointments. Alternatively, ask your vet if massage is okay for your dog before making the first massage appointment.

### CONCLUSION

No matter how well we care for our dogs, disease and injuries still occur. But it is very important to know that our care and attention to their health and well-being is paid back because dogs instinctly show appreciation by being more active, calmer and happier which creates a stronger bond between the dog and its human family.

Dogs' unconditional love and loyalty are precious. We should never take them for granted and should treasure their loyalty to us, ensuring they are kept healthy, strong, well balanced in mind and body, allowing them to retain agility and health well into an advanced age. We need to make sure our animals get the same consideration and health opportunities we do.

As awareness grows on the importance and benefits of CMT. I'm sure it will become an integral part of canine healthcare. Dog owners will see the difference it makes to the animal's quality of life, the behavioural improvements and the dog's health and general well-being. 🐾

\*Beth Parton has more than 30 years of experience in massage and has diplomas in remedial, lymphatic and Swedish massage. In 2009 she completed the qualification in Canine Myofunctional Therapy and is one of the first in New Zealand to offer CMT. Her business, KarmaK9 Dog Massage – NZ Canine Myofunctional Therapy Centre, is based on Auckland's Hibiscus Coast. She offers a mobile service in Auckland, North Shore, Albany, Hibiscus Coast and Warkworth to private dog owners, breeders, clubs, grooming companies, working dogs, boarding kennels, etc. Anyone living outside these areas can bring their dog to her or arrange for a special distance home visit. Beth welcomes referrals from vets and other animal therapists who work with dogs. She also offers workshops in how to give a dog a short wellness massage. Contact Beth on 09 421 1812 or 0272 665 010 or at [karmak9dogmassage@hotmail.com](mailto:karmak9dogmassage@hotmail.com) and her website is [www.karmak9dogmassage.co.nz](http://www.karmak9dogmassage.co.nz)