



FEATURE

Canine Massage

THE HANDS ON APPROACH

Words: Tim Norris

In recent years, it is hard not to notice the increase in the promotion of health awareness and the growing range of wellbeing approaches that are available to us.

As our own health awareness increases, it is only natural that this would extend to our four legged friends. After all, we all want our dogs to live longer, happier and healthier lives.

The world of Natural Therapies for dogs is growing, with more owners looking for ways to help enhance their dog's wellbeing, alongside more traditional approaches.

More and more people are embracing a more preventative approach to wellbeing, and finding ways to keep their dogs healthier for longer, instead of waiting until there is a problem before they start to make changes.

The great news for our dogs is that there is an increased awareness amongst vets about the many benefits of natural therapies and how they can complement the treatment options they offer.

So working alongside your vet, your natural therapist can help offer the best possible care for your dog.

I will be focusing on one key approach to improving your dog's health and wellbeing, and that is Massage.





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The Benefits of Massage

Many studies have shown that the power of touch is truly fundamental to communication, bonding and our health. We all know how much our dogs love to be touched, and massage is a great way we can help strengthen our bond with our dogs and help enhance their wellbeing.

Massage has long been an integral and natural component of Physiotherapy, Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Therapy in humans, and in recent years, massage has steadily gained acceptance as an effective form of therapy for dogs too.

Massage can help benefit our dogs in a variety of ways, both physically and emotionally. It's not uncommon to see anxious and stressed dogs relax and settle down with the calm therapeutic approach of massage.

I personally have seen many dog owners intuitively massage their dogs, when they are stiff and sore and the positive reactions from the dogs. Massage can assist with a range of different conditions, whether your dog is a young performance dog or a senior, much loved member of the family.



Massage can help:

- Stress related conditions that in time, if not addressed, can cause long term health issues
- Issues involving muscular pain and discomfort
- Improve movement quality and joint stiffness
- Improve the function of many of our body systems such as the digestive and immune system
- Improve our dog's agility and mobility, and performance levels
- Improve circulation and assist organs to function more effectively
- Increase the physical and emotional bond between you and your dog

Massage for Injury Prevention and Preventative Health Care

Whenever our dogs physically exert themselves, their muscles will be working. In some cases where dogs can over exert themselves, this can often create tension in their muscles.

This in turn can reduce the oxygen supply to the tense muscles and inhibit the removal of waste products from the muscles, and before you know it, your dog can be an uncomfortable cycle of pain and muscle tension.

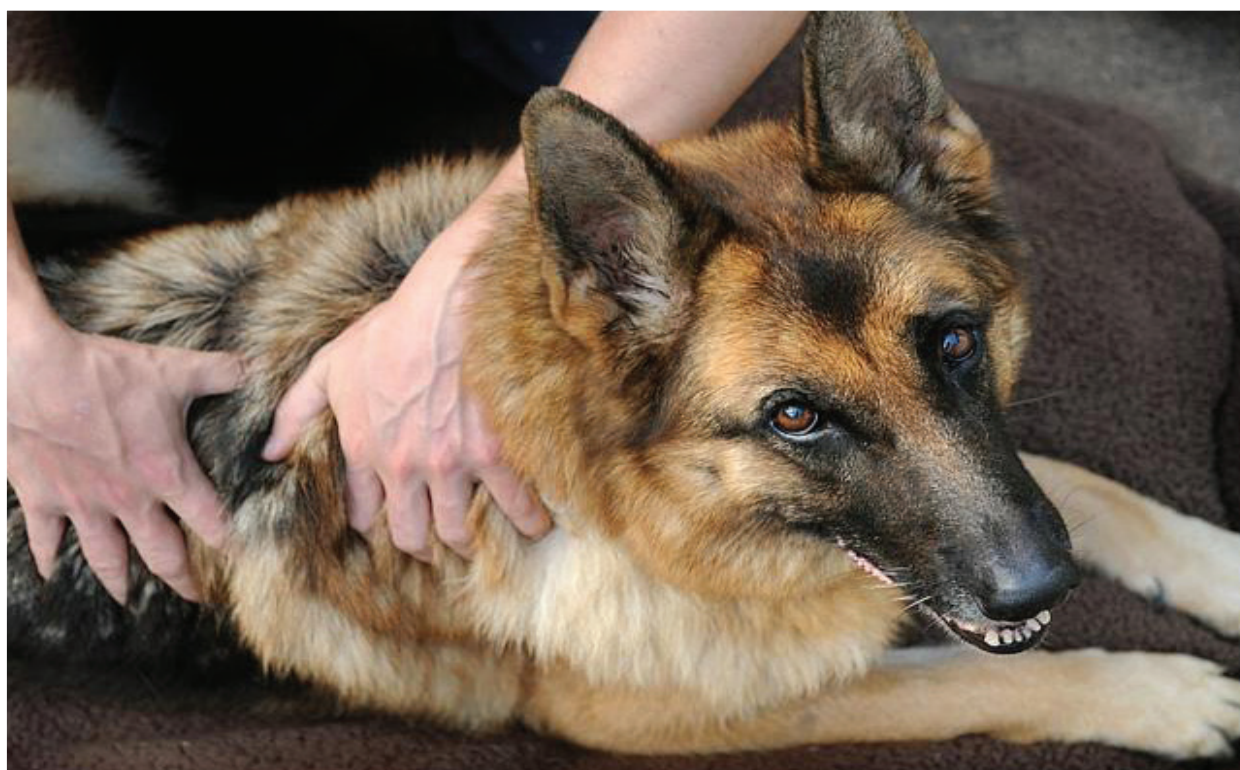
This in time can lead to changes in the way your dog moves and functions, which will inevitably lead to compensation patterns and the likelihood of degenerative changes affecting your dog, such as arthritis.

So Massage can become a very useful tool in breaking these cycles of pain by helping release tension in the muscles and eliminating the build up of waste products and toxins from the muscles.

This is a very important way massage can help prevent injuries, improve movement quality, accelerate muscle recovery and potentially help slow down degenerative changes affecting your dog.

So rewarding your dog with a regular massage can not only show how much you love them, but also be a key component in a preventative wellbeing strategy; as we all want our dogs to be healthy, happy and be with us as long as possible.

That is why preventative health care approaches are becoming increasingly popular amongst health aware dog owners and massage can play an important role in helping us do the best for our four legged friends.



Massage Sequence

Here are a couple of gentle massage moves you can apply to your dog using a gentle stroking technique called 'Effleurage'. Effleurage can help increase the blood flow to the muscles and is a great way to bond with your dog, whilst helping improve their wellbeing.

It is important to remember, that the stroking movements are made in the direction of the hair growth on your dog.

I would recommend applying these techniques when your dog is lying down and relaxed. It is important that you are also calm and keep your hands relaxed, open and flat when massaging your dog.

Use gentle stroking movements, keep a slow but rhythmic pace whilst massaging your dog.

Place one hand gently on the shoulder blade and gently stroke over the muscles on the shoulder blade and continue down the length of the front leg. When you reach the paw, just slowly bring your hand up and repeat again.



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Massage Sequence

You can perform this sequence up to 6 times before working on the opposite leg.

Pay close attention to your dog whilst you are massaging them, and always stop if they show any signs of discomfort or pain. Then perform the same technique on the hind legs. Gently place your open hand on the top of the thigh and gently stroke down the thigh muscles, and continue down the leg till you reach the paw. Then slowly bring your hand up and repeat the sequence up to 6 times before working on the opposite leg.

There are times that you should not massage your dog:

- If there is a local infection of the area
- Inflammation of the skin
- If there is bleeding or an open wound
- If tumours are present
- If your dog has a fever

“If you are in any doubt, always consult with your local Vet first.”

Tim Norris runs a canine wellbeing and rehabilitation business specialising in Canine Myofunctional Therapy, Bowen Technique, Laser Therapy, Acupuncture, Gua Sha Massage and Onnetsu Heat Therapy.

He spent over 15 years working with people in the area of health, fitness and wellbeing before working with dogs.

His business ‘Both Ends of the Lead’ offers a range of wellbeing services for dogs and owners.

To find out more information, visit www.bothendsofthelead.com.au and www.facebook.com/BothEndsOfTheLead.

