



MEMBERS ONLY

**EQUINE
ASSESSMENT,
MUSCLE THERAPY
& REHABILITATION**



Exclusively Equine
VETERINARY SERVICES

EQUINE ASSESSMENT, MUSCLE THERAPY & REHABILITATION

Presented by Kate Shorter,
Happy Horse Sports Therapy



Equine assessment involves looking closely at your horse's stance and posture, muscle development, movement and general way of going. Other terms for this are equine biomechanics and gait analysis. Basically, it identifies any soundness issues and the problematic limb.

This assessment is important as it enables your therapist to work out where your horse is compensating, what parts of their body they're not using properly and where their pain may be.

Things to look at include how your horse stands. Does he always stand with the same foot forward or resting? Are his muscles even and symmetrical? When he's moving, does he move with his limbs evenly on two tracks? Does he drag his toes, drop or hike a hip, or is there a head bob? Does he have the same stride length for all four limbs? Does he back up cleanly, or does he step wide with one leg or drag his toes?

The way your horse chooses to move tells your therapist a lot about how he's moving his body to get the job done. A lot about the horse's body and way of going (movement) can be seen in the hooves.

Does your horse continually wear one side (or part) of his hoof more than the rest of the foot? If there is pain and discomfort in your horse's body, you'll see it in the wear patterns on the hooves and, if his hooves aren't comfortable, you'll feel the effects through his body.

Has your horse had any trauma to his body? Trauma can cause significant body issues through scar tissue, muscle atrophy, muscle hypertrophy, compromised tendons, etc. This trauma usually surfaces as compromised movement, posture and body use in the horse. Even if you think the trauma has healed, the effects on the body can, unfortunately, be ever-lasting.



GET STARTED WITH THERAPY FROM HOME

Throughout this article, Kate gives you tips to get started with sport massage, stretching and kinesiology taping at home with your own horse.

Supporting your horse's range of going, preparation and recovery, these highly effective therapies can be used safely at an introductory level on a regular basis. For more intensive therapy, seek the advice of a therapist.

Muscle therapy is key to restoring movement and optimal function to your horse's body. Muscle therapy releases tension, relaxes fascia, improves your horse's range of motion through the joints, increases circulation, eases pain, allows the skeleton to gently 'realign' any subluxations of its own accord, and helps to improve your horse's posture and movement.

The bodywork I do on horses uses a combination of modalities. It's a blend of physiotherapy, osteopathy and chiropractic techniques to bring the most benefit to your horse's body. After the session, developing correct muscular strength is also imperative, so your horse doesn't slip into his old familiar patterns. For this reason, I provide exercises to the owner, tailored to the horse's specific issues.

When selecting an equine muscle therapist, ensure your candidate has an exceptional knowledge of equine anatomy. It's important to know the function of each muscle (or group of muscles) on the skeleton, so they can be effective with their treatment. Bodywork isn't simply a 'feel good' massage for your horse. It's about restoring correct form and function to your horse's body.

Once the issues in the body have been identified through assessment and then worked on with muscle therapy, the next step is rehabilitation. This involves doing the exercises your therapist prescribes to re-train your horse to use the correct muscles for optimal movement and posture. If your horse is ridden, we want to train their muscles to accommodate a rider. We also want to improve his muscular strength to take the pressure off already compromised joints. Just 10-15 minutes a day can make a huge improvement to your horse's physical health and happiness.

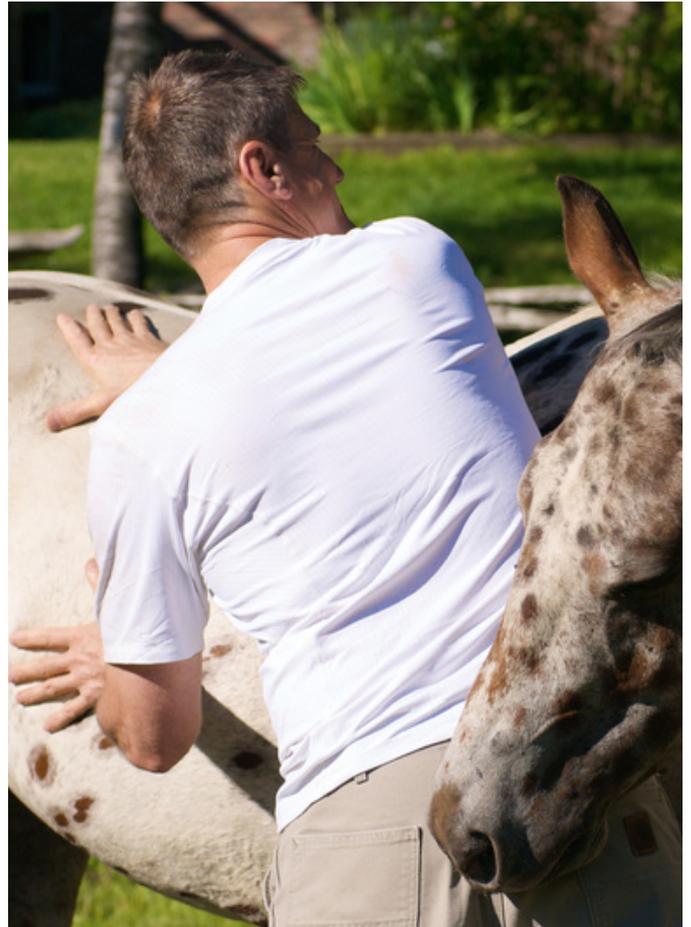
If you have a horse that you're about to break in, there is groundwork you can do beforehand to better prepare your horse's body to handle the weight of saddle and rider. The horse's back is a non-weight-bearing structure. It was humans who decided long ago the horse was docile enough to catch and the back looked like a comfortable place to sit. Horses are flight animals and the back is not designed to carry weight. For this reason, teaching your horse how to engage his core muscles, and how to carry himself properly is imperative if you want to add weight to his back and change his centre of gravity.

SPORTS MASSAGE

While regular massage offers valid treatment for overworked, stressed muscles, sports massage is a treatment given with the understanding not only of anatomy and physiology, but also of the particular demands placed on the horse's body as a result of its workload and discipline.

Sports massage is done with the principal mandate of returning the horse to its desired activity with the same or better level of function. It can include more aggressive techniques (than with regular massage) that approach muscles more deeply. Sports massage will often utilise a variety of modalities, such as remedial massage, trigger/stress point therapy, cross fibre techniques and deep tissue work.

Primarily though, the difference between regular massage and sports massage lies with function, that is, the return of the equine to full or better function, so they are happy in their work and can perform at their best. Sports massage techniques play a very important role in prevention therapy and in recovery from injury. These massage techniques have led to a much richer relationship with the animal, due to better care for their needs.



GET STARTED

1

Start with light pressure and slowly increase it as your horse responds to you.

2

A safe place to start is around the withers with scratches, then turn this into massage behind the scapula.

3

Not all massage has to be firm or 'deep tissue' to be effective. Try just placing your hands on your horse's back and wait for him to respond with a yawn or lick and chew. Very slowly, move your hands back towards the rump. It should take you 10 minutes to get from withers to lumbar on one side.

Massage allows your therapist to assess the physical condition of your horse, reduce injury, break up scar tissue, and relieve spasms and knots. This is important as it allows the trainer to evaluate the success of the horse's training program. It also enables the handler to identify if a horse might be sore and for the therapist to identify the location of the sore spots.

Regular massage sessions help prevent your horse from injury as it stimulates circulation and unsticks adhesions which, in turn, means less 'down-time' where your horse is unrideable, due to lameness or healing. Improved circulation is a by-product of massage, and helps to eliminate toxins and boosts blood flow. This is important as it activates the lymphatic system and aids lymphatic flow.

It also helps to reduce fluid build-up and muscle soreness. This, in turn, aids nutrients and water supplies to your horse's muscles. Regular massages can reduce pain and enhance performance. Supple muscles mean increased flexibility and range of motion, improved gait quality and better stamina. A horse with healthy muscles that is feeling good will also have better posture and a better response to injuries, allowing them to heal quicker.

SPORTS MASSAGE

These benefits are important as they contribute to a longer, more efficient stride, and help your horse to be more agile, with better take-off and landing. This will contribute to a longer performing life for your horse. Massage is also excellent for relaxation and to improve your horse's disposition. This is important as we all want our horses to be happy and to work willingly. A friendly horse is much nicer and safer to be around than one that is cranky and wants to bite or kick its handler.

Massage releases endorphins and makes your horse feel good. Horses can continue physical activity even in the presence of muscle/body tightness and mild discomfort. In fact, to some observers, they will appear 100% sound. Releasing the muscles of tension early on can prevent an injury further down the track.

STRETCHING

Stretching, in its most basic form, is a natural and automatic action. People often stretch instinctively after waking from sleep or after long periods of inactivity. While the benefits of daily exercise are numerous and well known, the benefits of a regular stretching routine are far less emphasised, but just as important.

Incorporating stretching into your horse's workouts is just as important to their health and body function as regular exercise. Horses can continue physical activity even in the presence of muscle/body tightness and mild discomfort. In fact, to some observers, they will appear 100% sound.

In the presence of tightness, as we humans know, other ailments are just around the corner. Muscle tightness leads to an entire chain reaction as the body tries to adapt. Just because we cannot see the tightness, does not mean it isn't there. Any muscles that are not entirely toned, loose and in harmony with their surrounding muscle groups are working against your horse.



The most established and obvious benefit of stretching is to help improve flexibility and range of motion. An increase in flexibility is accompanied by improved balance, proprioception and coordination. As the body ages, muscles can become tighter and range of motion in the joints can be minimised. A lack of flexibility can cause movement to become slower and less fluid, making your horse more susceptible to muscle strains or soft tissue injuries.

This can put a dampner on your riding as your horse struggles to do what you're asking of him. Chronically tense and tight muscles can also contribute to poor posture. Stretching helps to ensure correct posture by lengthening tight muscles that pull areas of the body away from their intended position. Stretching the muscles through the back and rump can help keep the spine in better alignment and improve overall posture. Stretching has also been proven to help increase blood flow to the muscles. This increase in flow brings with it a greater nutrient supply to muscles, thereby reducing muscle soreness and helping to speed recovery. The less sore your horse's muscles are, the less painful it will be for him to work those same muscles and to exercise in general.

GET STARTED

1

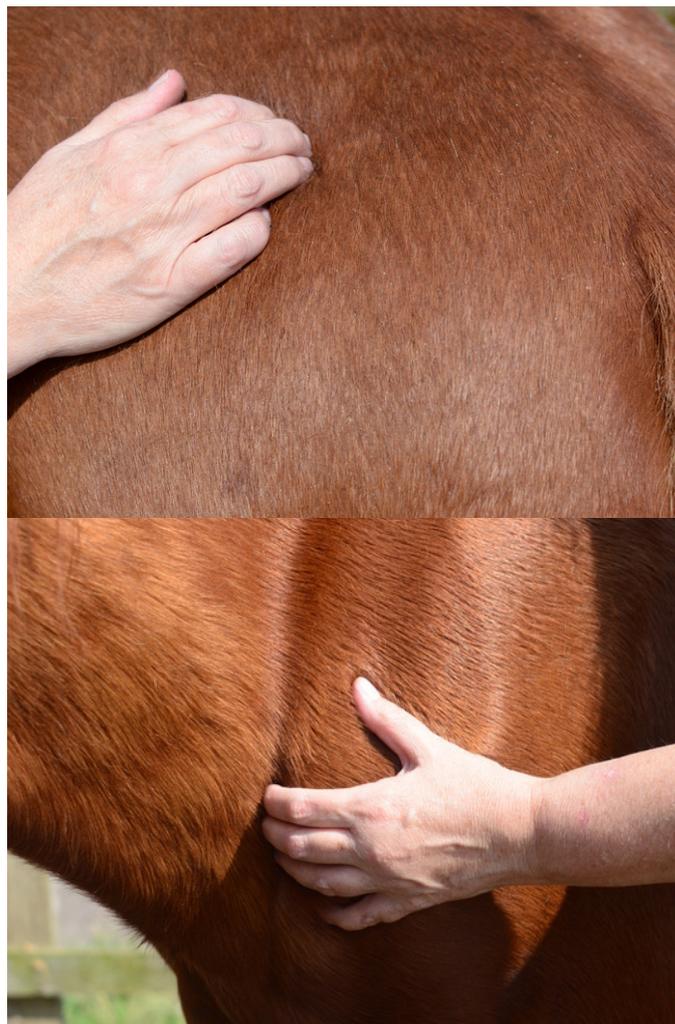
Only stretch your horse when he is warmed up.

2

Use a carrot (or treat of any kind) to ask your horse to reach around and stretch for the treat. You can ask him to reach for his stifle, hock, fetlock, shoulder, knee or down between his two front legs as far as he can go. It's amazing the lengths some horses will go to for a treat!

3

Only stretch as far as your horse is comfortable. Try to hold the stretch for five seconds to start with, building up to two minutes. This is called traction stretching.



KINESIOLOGY

Since its early inception, kinesiology taping practices for the human athlete have demonstrated its successful use in rehabilitation, injury prevention and training. Our horses are athletes too - we ask them to carry a rider, which isn't something nature intended for this 'flight' animal - which is why the tape is so effective on equines.

At Happy Horse Sports Therapy, Kate is a certified Equi-Taping Practitioner, graduating her course with distinction. The tape can be used for multiple purposes, depending on how it is applied. Kinesiology tape assists the body's own healing mechanisms, interacts with the skin and associated neuro-sensory and mechano-receptors, decompresses tissue to facilitate blood and lymph flow, as well as impacting pain receptors, and facilitates movement by recoiling muscles and supporting joints.

Tape can be used in a therapeutic or corrective way, or it can be used during athletic training. By taping your horse, we can reduce fatigue, facilitate recovery and healing, decrease recovery time and decrease swelling, inflammation and pain.

We can also use the tape to increase blood and lymph flow to help muscles and joints to work more efficiently, support joints, tendons and ligaments, assist joint and muscle movement by encouraging a full range of motion, decrease muscle spasms and increase athletic potential.

It's important to remember the tape is only as effective as its application and to apply it in a way that will achieve the goal. Your therapist must have an excellent knowledge of equine anatomy - that is, muscle insertions, origins and function.

GET STARTED

1

Anyone can apply kinesiology tape to their horse, but it's important to know what you want to tape for (anatomically-speaking), as the tape is only effective if it is applied correctly.

2

To relax muscles, tape from the insertion of the muscle to the origin of the muscle; to active muscles, tape from the origin to the insertion.

3

Be sure to leave about two inches either end of your tape to allow for anchoring so it doesn't lift as easily.

TENS THERAPY

TENS stands for Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation. A TENS machine is a medical device which trained therapists use to assist with pain relief, promote circulation and invigorate muscles. It works by transmitting a low-voltage electrical signal through electrodes attached to the skin around the area which is experiencing pain.

This results in a tingling feeling, 'pins and needles' or even warmth during treatment, which can replace the feeling of pain. The TENS has also been referred to by some as a type of 'electrical massage'.

At Happy Horse Sports Therapy, we see many horses who present with muscle pain in three key regions, namely the neck, mid-thoracic back and lumbar-sacral back. For this reason, these are the main areas where your therapist might place the TENS pads on your horse.

Also, the TENS machine is very good at bringing function back to atrophied muscles and your therapist might choose to use it for this purpose on your horse by placing all four pads onto one particular muscle.

The soothing pain relief some horses experience can be instant and, in some cases, it can happen after a few minutes of use. It can also have the effect of stimulating the body to release endorphins, which is the body's natural pain relief treatment.

PHOTONIC THERAPY

Photonic therapy, also known as red light therapy, is a natural therapy promoting the body's own immune responses, its own methods of controlling pain and its own healing abilities. This therapy uses the energy of light to produce a calming, therapeutic effect.

Photonic therapy is a painless, safe and effective form of therapy derived from a combination of scientific research and traditional Chinese medicine. It uses a 660nm wavelength of red light to stimulate the body's own capacity to heal itself, reduce pain and trigger physiological changes.

The use of a red-coloured light on the skin influences muscles and acupoints (or traditional acupuncture points) in order to effect areas of the body in a certain way. Acupoints are areas of increased electrical activity, which is why they are responsive to the application of red light.

Photonic therapy can be used alone or in conjunction with other therapies. Acupoints, which can be stimulated with needles, pressure or, in this case, red light, have been defined as areas on the skin that may be associated with pain sensitivity, are slightly acidic, have a positive charge and have increased electrical conductivity.

PHOTONIC THERAPY

Areas containing acupoints are also thought to be thinner areas of skin with an increased concentration of subcutaneous collagen - the stimulation of which can change physiological body functions.

The photonic torch works by creating a more negative charge in the body, thus neutralising the positive energy. When a beam of photons strikes a positively charged acupoint, a bio-electrical magnetic current is generated. This switches on a stimulus response via the collagen, to the nerves and to the brain which, in turn, causes pain reduction, repair and healing to occur.

Stimulating specific combinations of points on the skin will cause the brain to release particular hormones and additional chemical substances that relieve pain, increase immune response and promote healing. There are so many stimuli flooding the brain at any point in time, the brain has the ability to switch off and ignore this stimulus.

This is what happens if the body has a condition or pain that goes on for an extended period of time - the brain will switch off its response to the problem and the body will stop healing it. By using red light to stimulate certain areas of the skin, we can change the information the brain is receiving and cause chemicals in the brain to be re-released, which will cause the body to heal. This electrical stimulation can last for an extended period of time as we have changed the electrical potential of the cell.



Happy Horse Sports Therapy is a locally owned and operated business, servicing horses and ponies in Ipswich and surrounds.

Not happy with the way her own horses were behaving under saddle, owner Kate Shorter tried many therapies and even more therapists before deciding to learn how to help horses herself. After obtaining several qualifications, Kate started Happy Horse Sports Therapy in 2013 and has helped to bring out the best in hundreds of horses to date.

CONTACT US

Call Kate now to help your horse be the best they can be.

Call: 0402 479 429

Email: enquiries@HappyHorseSportsTherapy.com.au

Visit: www.HappyHorseSportsTherapy.com.au

Sessions with a Happy Horse Sports therapist include a thorough assessment of the muscle development and posture of your horse, gait analysis at walk and trot, and an analysis of your horse's biomechanics and proprioception. Our therapy services include sports massage, deep tissue mobilisation, stretching, myofascial release, cranio-sacral therapy, photonic therapy, TENS therapy, kinesiology taping and saddle-fit assessment. All therapists have solid equine anatomy and biomechanics knowledge, and understand the demands placed on the horse's body by the rider, its workload and discipline.