



## Canine Myofunctional Therapy

Is your dog getting that little bit older? Starting to struggle when getting up? Seeming to be unbalanced when walking? Recovering from a recent orthopaedic surgery? Experiencing anxiety problems? An athlete?

If so, then Canine Myofunctional Therapy may be beneficial to them!

### What is it?

Canine Myofunctional Therapy or CMT is, in the most basic of terms, a massage treatment for dogs. Humans have been experiencing the benefits of massage for many decades, right back in the ancient times it was a technique used by the Greeks, Egyptians and the Chinese. These ancient cultures understood that there are many benefits to massage both physically and psychologically. Why wouldn't we want to share this with our pets? Our aim is to combine traditional veterinary medicine and CMT to help improve the overall health and well being of your favourite four-legged friend!

In this handout we will explain what massage actually is, its direct effects on your dog's body and why it is something we recommend to clients. We will also give you a little information on the rehabilitation and psychological benefits of massage. Also, just to make sure that CMT is the right treatment for your dog, we have included some contraindications or reasons why massage cannot be performed on some animals.

### How does massage work?

Did you know that the skin is the largest organ of the body and has over a million nerve endings? The skin, muscles, ligaments and joints of the body hold everything together; if these aspects are not working at their best then the whole of the animal may suffer, no matter what the species. CMT is a treatment that helps to stimulate the body and return it to its best possible function. The massage works by soothing the soft tissue and encouraging relaxation. By increasing blood flow, massage can supply much needed oxygen and nutrients to the skin and muscle cells and can help drain those same cells of by-products and waste. This transfer through the cells means that the body has the best possible chance to heal itself.

### Benefits of Canine Myofunctional Therapy:

- Stimulates the cardiovascular system to increase blood flow and promote healing
- Increases flexibility and range of motion of joints, decreasing the risk of future strain and injury
- Relaxes and refreshes the muscles to relieve spasms and cramps
- Improves lymphatic drainage (detoxifying effect)
- Delivers oxygen and nutrients to the cells to provide for efficient function
- Can stimulate or calm the nervous system and thus the cardiovascular system
- Decreases stress and pain through endorphin release

- Resets neural impulses and reestablishes natural biomechanics training the body back into the best movement
- Decreases levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenalin, which can impair immune function
- Increases ability of athletes due to improved preparation and cool down techniques
- Can improve behavioural problems that may possibly be stemming from underlying physical discomfort

CMT has been shown to improve a range of specific disorders. These include;

- Back and neck pain
- Arthritis
- Soft tissue injuries
- Anxiety
- High blood pressure
- Chronic pain
- Constipation
- Depression
- Insomnia/Unsettled behavior

However it is best to get your dog checked over by a veterinarian to decide if CMT is an appropriate treatment.

As with any health treatment there are certain situations in which we cannot perform CMT. Any recent injuries or operations must be left for 7-10 days before massaging. If massaged before this time the dog may develop a condition called '*myositis ossificans*', which is when the muscle fibres can harden and seize. If your dog is experiencing any lameness or is non weight bearing it is best to get it checked out by your vet to rule out any underlying bone problems and to give it time to heal. Similarly any injuries that are inflamed, swollen or excessively warm cannot be massaged until the area has been through the initial stages of healing. If performed too early and disrupting the self healing process, massage can spread unwanted cells and material to other parts of the body. This is also the case if your dog has malignant cancer (cancer cells that spread) or infection. As massage affects the cardiovascular

system and blood flow throughout the body CMT is not recommended for any dogs who have existing heart problems and/or are on blood thinning medication. Any unstable ligament or bone damage is not recommended to be massaged. Also as to be expected any broken, damaged or burnt skin should not be massaged under any circumstance. The first trimester of pregnancy and straight after travel are also contraindications to administering CMT due to the delicate nature of circulation at these times.

### **Canine Myofunctional Therapy as rehabilitation:**

Often if a dog has experienced a trauma or has undergone surgery then rehabilitation will be needed to get the muscles functioning properly again. If left without any after care muscles can waste away or experience secondary injuries. When a human or an animal hurts a limb they often overcompensate with the opposite one, this creates a level of imbalance that exists right down to the muscles themselves. The body is then pulled in certain directions which may mean it cannot move in the most biomechanically efficient way, resulting in more difficult, often slower movements. When using CMT for rehabilitation massage it is possible to see which muscles are not coping and which muscles are doing all the work, then with massage and stretching techniques we can relax some muscles and strengthen others. This action is how muscles work. For one muscle to contract and move a limb another opposing muscle must relax and stretch. Massaging out any adhesions (sticking points) within a muscle means that it can perform its job more efficiently and create an equal administration of force. After orthopaedic surgeries a dog will often be confined for a series of weeks to ensure the repair of the bone is successful. In these cases the muscles are not being used as they normally would leading to atrophy and weakness. Using stretching techniques is a way of making these restricted muscles go through their usual range of motion, thus exercising them and preventing muscle

wastage. As CMT professionals we also have a small amount of training in rehabilitation techniques to use once your dog is back running around and healthy. We recommend techniques that you can do at home for your dog with objects that may be lying around your own yard. We can give you demonstrations of these, as well as running through any other rehabilitation that your vet may have recommended.