

Steering clear of 'stuck'



Why your horse needs chiropractic and bodywork therapies

By Kim Kizzier

'Stuck' might not be the most technical word to describe immovable vertebrae or joints, muscle spasms, bound-up fascia, or interrupted meridian flow but 'stuck' is exactly what these conditions feel like. A balanced, well-flowing body will function at top performance, health, and state of homeostasis while a 'stuck' body will be in a constant condition of compensation in the quest to find balance. While it isn't always known what might cause the initial trouble area in the body, it is certain that other areas will be affected, especially if not addressed sooner rather than later.

A common example of this is: an ill-fitting saddle on a horse might trap his scapula or shoulder blade preventing full movement or range of motion and thus causing muscle soreness and possible bruising. The horse begins to push his shoulders forward to avoid the entrapment and pain. Many muscle groups are involved in this new way of being; some muscles are stretched and others are shortened. Muscle strain will eventually result in tendon strain because tendons are what attach muscles to bone. If the joints at the bone ends are being pulled out of balance due to taut and/or lax muscles and tendons, they will begin to show signs of the stress as will ligaments and nerves and the syndrome will continue to other structures both seen and unseen

through-out the body. Oftentimes, by the time we notice our horses are experiencing lameness or problems, the issues have been going on for a long while and many more structures have been affected than we realize.

It is uncanny how often I see the above shoulder syndrome associated with horses that have been diagnosed with navicular syndrome or other serious pathologies within the body, especially the front-end. I often find myself wondering, "what came first - the chicken or the egg?" But in the end, we still have to raise the chick. If addressing one issue and not the other, it is likely that the problem won't be solved completely.

When referencing this connection throughout the body, I like to refer to the very wise little song most of us learned in kindergarten that suggests: "the foot bone is connected to the ankle bone - the ankle bone is connected to the shin bone - the shin bone is connected to the knee bone...." and so on. The entire body is connected via numerous bodily structures and systems and one almost always affects the next whether we are aware of it or not.

Dr. Tammy Anderson, DVM, a veterinary chiropractor from Bowdle, S.D., reports that just the weight of a dime on a nerve will reduce the nerve's function by 70 percent. "The fact of the matter with regards to horses that have no history of traumatic injury, is

that all movement in the body is dictated by the nerves telling the muscles to contract or hold fast. If the vertebrae are moving freely, there is no pressure on the nerves exiting the spinal cord. However, if even one vertebrae is not moving as well as it should, there is pressure on the nerve exiting that area of the spinal cord. This pressure will decrease the firing power of the nerve and reduces the function of the muscle. For example, if the nerve that fires on one of the muscles that braces the knee (working properly keeps the knee from hyper-extending) has pressure on it, every time the horse steps on that leg it gives a little more. Finally after over use, the knee can develop boney additions to help stabilize the joint, stepping in where the muscle is failing to do its job. Chiropractic can keep the vertebrae moving normally allowing the nerves, muscles and joints to operate correctly and the horse to perform at the level to which he was trained. In the case of past trauma, be it acute or chronic, chiropractic can help to get nerves firing and muscles contracting and reduce further injury to joints further down from the spinal cord," says Anderson.

Several pathologic factors can be affecting a body either individually or more likely simultaneously and can be addressed from many different angles. It is rare that all techniques will work for every body at every time so it can take diligence and

acute awareness on the part of the owner/trainer as well as bodywork, chiropractic, veterinary, and other horse health care practitioners. Teamwork is invaluable when it comes to health and horse care and it is also important to keep your veterinarian involved at all times.

The Art of Feel

When most people hear the word "massage," they often have preconceived notions of what that might entail. More often than not, many folks tend to think of "massage" and "spa treatment" as one and the same. Not to negate the amazing benefits one receives from the typical spa-type massage, it is important to understand that massage therapy is a broad term that covers numerous modalities and levels of understanding. Most states require human massage and bodywork therapists to be licensed, certified, and insured but most animal practitioners are not yet governed by these regulations so it is important for owners and trainers to inquire as to the level of training and experience their practitioners may have in determining the type of treatment they should expect. Mike Scott practices and teaches both human and equine bodywork and speaks at veterinary conferences on massage and muscle therapy as well as saddle fit. At a recent continuing education course, Scott emphasized the extreme importance on constant education and knowledge in the fields of

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muscle therapy but suggested that at the same time, we should never lose sight of the fact that the practice of bodywork is also an art. Anatomy, physiology, and theory are often much easier learned than is the art of feel.

The Many Modalities of Bodywork Therapy

Massage or muscle therapy has many benefits for the body including: improved performance, quicker recovery from injury and exertion, endorphin release, relaxation and calming, increased circulation, improved range of motion, emotional changes, assists good metabolism and helps remove toxins from the system. Massage has positive affects on both the musculo-skeletal and neuromuscular systems. Massage is invaluable in the assessment of pain within the horse's body. It is amazing how much we can learn

from a horse when spending some good, quality hands-on time with them. There are a few contraindications to a full massage or acupressure treatment but light or spot treatments may still be indicated in some cases. A full treatment 24 hours before or after breeding, 24 hours before or after competition, during times of high fever, acute trauma, inflammatory conditions, infectious disease, or with cancerous tumors or cysts is not generally indicated but light work can be beneficial. Massage treatments during pregnancy should be monitored by a trained professional.

Myofascial Release

Fascial and myofascial bodywork focuses on releasing restrictions and adhesions in the fascial tissue that lies between individual muscles, tendons, bone, and skin. This tissue is an important component in structure and proper function within the body, but when it becomes bound up because of scar tissue, trauma,



Dr. Anderson adjusts the back of this horse.

compensation, etc., fascial adhesions and restrictions can wreck havoc on soft tissue function within the body. Restrictions on this level can remain for a lifetime causing pain, discomfort, and lack of proper movement leaving the body in a permanent state of 'stuck'. Myofascial release work is generally performed in a very slow, precise, and sometimes quite deep manner and often shows dramatic results and comfort for the patient although it is not always comfortable during the process. Connective tissue, which is another term for fascia and/or scar tissue, will form anytime an injury occurs in the attempt to help the injury site heal. We need this additional growth during the healing process, however, once the injury heals, the connective or scar tissue remains intact until it is broken up and released. I have watched horses (and people) walk off after a treatment of myofascial release with such dramatic results

that it can take a couple days for them to figure out how to move within their new found freedom.

Trigger Points

Trigger Points, or Ah Shi points as Traditional Chinese theory refers to them, are small areas of muscle spasm throughout the body. Like fascial restrictions, trigger points can remain in the body for many years. A pain management doctor who works with trigger points recently told me the story of a man who had suffered years of debilitating pain and disability due to shrapnel wounds he acquired in WWII. She found and released several trigger points deep within the muscle and this man found relief for the first time in many, many years. Trigger points can be released by many means including (but not limited to) manual massage technique, laser, and injections.

Trigger points are known to refer pain to another part of the body further away from the original

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site. Janet Travel, MD, and David Simon, MD, have contributed years of research, study, and theory on trigger points and their common paths of pain referral. It is important to look beyond where pain appears to be centered when assessing pain in the body.

Acupressure and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupressure techniques are a unique study based on restoring the flow of Chi (life force energy) through the meridians (a one-network system through which Chi is carried to all parts of the body) within the body. Acupressure is based on the same science as acupuncture, except that in acupuncture the practitioner utilizes needles and in acupressure he/she utilizes hands, low level laser, or similar means to access the acupoint. There are over 350 acupoints in the body. An acupoint is analogous to a pool of energy located along the meridian and used to balance energy. To legally practice acupuncture, one must be a

licensed veterinarian professionally trained in acupuncture. Acupressure practitioners generally attend a very in-depth schooling but are not required to have a veterinary license. Based on an Eastern approach to assessment, acupressure is very systematic yet looks at the whole body to find imbalance. Hippocrates once said that, "It is more important to know what kind of man has a disease, than what kind of disease a man has."

Chiropractic

In most states, chiropractic care for horses is regulated by the state veterinary board. According to Anderson, "In South Dakota, state law dictates that only licensed veterinarians are legal to practice chiropractic on animals. This law is to protect not only the unsuspecting animal owner, but also the animal getting the treatment to ensure above all no harm is done to the animal. Chiropractic is covered under this law because the use of chiropractic is treatment in cooperation with

veterinary medicine. Without the involvement of the medical aspect, major issues can be misdiagnosed and mistreated." Some states allow licensed chiropractors especially trained for animals to adjust animals as well.

When asked about her chiropractic training, Anderson replied, "The school I went to was located in Wellsville, Kan. To be enrolled in class you had to show proof of veterinary or human chiropractic license or transcripts showing you were in your last year of veterinary or chiropractic school. There are now many different curriculums available, my training was four and a half days every month for five months."

According to Anderson's website, www.crossroadsvet.net, "Chiropractic care is a practice that focuses on the relationship between structure and function (the spine and the nervous system). Animal chiropractic offers and provides an alternative method of care that is complementary to traditional care. When used side by side, many of your animal's joint and muscle

conditions respond dramatically, and rehabilitation can take place quickly and efficiently."

"Adjustments are made by applying controlled force at the correct angle to restore movement into a less mobile joint. Adjustments need to be made in a controlled, distraction free environment, preferably without other horses, treats and loud noises. Anyone who has visited a chiropractor knows adjustments may be painful, but the relief is worth it. First time adjustments may be time consuming, but usually are easier the second time."

Energetic Component

After 25+ years of practicing bodywork and sports therapy (including U.S. Track and Field Team), Mike Scott said that it wasn't until the past few years that he has begun to talk about and address the energetic component of bodywork. Still, when bringing up the topic in veterinary or medical circles, he says he has to convince members that they may want to sit down and listen because they

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will find interest and value in the subject. It is nearly impossible to spend years in the field of bodywork and not begin to feel and notice the power and effect of energy flowing through the body. Energetic pathways are hard to ignore when a person spends much of their life 'feeling' a body.

The other phenomenon that is impossible to ignore is the power of intention. Intent will direct and lead a therapeutic session and horses are very in tune with our intentions. We should never underestimate the power of touch or the power of intention.

Most Common Areas of Concern for Reining/Working Cow Horses

Horses that begin training for competition at an early age such as for futurities should be given every opportunity to grow and develop free from musculoskeletal stress.

These young horses are not only dealing with the normal stress of growing, but are learning to move with a saddle, weight, and in forms that are not natural to them. Hocks and stifle injections are a common practice that can often be avoided.

Hock strain is quite often a result of tight hamstring muscles (back of the hind from the pelvis) and imbalance in the pelvis and thoraco-lumbar joint. The thoraco-lumbar joint is not necessarily a joint but the junction between the last vertebrae in the thoracic column (connected to ribs) and the first lumbar vertebrae. The lumbar region has no bony structure to provide support, so stress to the weight bearing muscles is common. If the vertebrae or muscle find themselves in spasm or stuck, the pelvis moves out of alignment, and the hamstrings become very tight pulling on the hock joints.

Stifle problems are quite often a result of weak quadriceps muscles. When training for reining or working cow horse events, the quadriceps (front of the leg from

hip to knee) are often not worked correctly. Work on hills, ground poles, and cavalletti will help to build the quads.

Therapeutic bodywork and chiropractic can be invaluable for maintaining a happy, pain-free, and well-performing horse. Trainers and owners who watch and listen to a well-trained therapist are often amazed to find out how much is actually going on with their horses that can be addressed and managed.

Common Imbalances and Occurrences

Dr. Anderson says that one of the common problems she finds in training is the lack of warming up correctly. Several fast, loping circles, slide stops, and spins are not a proper warm-up. Dr. Anderson prefers long-trotting with straight lines or large circles until the horse is very well warmed up. Cooling out should be a nice, long process as well. Lots of sliding stops and fast spins and turns on a cold body will provide problems that could

have been avoided by taking the time for proper warm-up.

I was recently talking to a group of body workers at a conference and we all found a common phenomenon, especially in western horses; horse's bodies are pulled very out-of-balance from continually getting on and off on the left side of the horse and not using a fence or mounting block. While many English riders also get on and off the left side of the horse, they use a mounting block more often than western rider so we see this problem less with them. Most of us were taught that we 'had' to get on the left side of the horse but never questioned why. This practice was started back in the days of cavalry and wartime because the soldiers wore their swords on their left side and could not swing that leg. We have carried the practice into modern day and our horse's bodies show the result. Try to use both sides of the horse and try to use a fence or mounting block any chance you get. Your horse will thank you for it!

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Custer County Fair Ranch Horse Competition Results

The Custer County Fair 5th Annual Ranch Horse Competition was held Saturday, August 14, at the fairgrounds in Hermosa. Eighty-five entries entered in the seven classes offered. This was a fun-filled day with the weather cooperating beautifully. There were lots of great prizes, thanks to the many sponsors. Thank you to everyone that made the 2010 event possible from the sponsors to the volunteers and the competitors.

3-Year-Old Division 9 Entries

1. Stoyan Lucey, Hot Springs, S.D., Riding Belle Badger Boogie
2. Kirk Hall, Edgemont, S.D., Riding China
3. Tim Schaack, Edgemont, S.D., Riding Mimosa Please

Open Division 9 Entries

1. Stoyan Lucy, Hot Springs, S.D., Riding Haidas Cooke County
2. Tim Schaack, Edgemont, S.D., Riding Dude
3. Tom Coolahan, Hermosa, S.D., Riding Tripod

Ladies Open Division 8 Entries

1. Sonya Collahan, Hermosa, S.D., Riding Im Your Huckleberry
2. Alesa Jones, Anselmo, Neb., Riding HCJ Nine Lilbuttin
3. Jenelle Bussard, Watertown, S.D., Riding Catty's Little Pepper

Amateur Division 16 Entries

1. Mayola West, New Underwood, S.D., Riding Hero
2. Amanda Dikoff, Hermosa, S.D., Riding Oughtalenalittle
3. Mayola West, New Underwood, S.D., Riding Beezy
4. Bridget Helms, Newcastle, Wyo., Riding Mescalitos Up To Par

Ladies Division 16 Entries

1. Jill Pische, Newcastle, Wyo., Riding Satin
2. Alesa Jones, Anselmo, Neb., Riding Hollywoodredfeathers
3. Jenelle Bussard, Watertown, S.D., Riding Catty's Little Pepper
4. Jenlle Bussard, Watertown,



Amateur Division: L-R Mayola West, 1st and 3rd; Bridget Helms, 4th; Amanda Dikoff, 2nd.

- S.D., Riding Salsa
5. Abi Devereaux, Newcastle, Wyo., Riding Dori

Wyo., Riding Tex

Sr. Youth Division 4 Entries

1. Collin Palmer, Bison, S.D., Riding The Perfek Spark
2. Abi Devereaux, Newcastle,

Jr. Youth Division 10 Entries

1. Brianna Clemetson, Keystone, S.D., Riding Spud
2. Peyton Kottwitz, Lusk, Wyo., Riding Okie

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Saddle fit is a topic that never goes away. Just when we seem to get our saddle fitting correctly, our horse's body changes. Saddle fitting is a constant job. Never assume that just because it fit last year, it still fits now. Check for dry spots, rub areas, and muscling pattern changes especially around the shoulders and loins. Have a quality bodyworker check your horse often to confirm that your horse is happy with his saddle fit.

Don't forget the importance of properly balanced feet and proper dental care. It is nearly impossible to do bodywork and not find the effects of ill balanced feet and mouth on the musculo-skeletal system. Everything works

together.

With a well trained and qualified horse health team, your horse should be happy and able to perform at some level well into old age. Over the long term, the costs associated with preventative care by hiring a bodyworker or chiropractor to check and rebalance your horse may add years to your horse's productive career and save your pocketbook from the expense of serious veterinary intervention.

Kim Kizzier is a licensed massage therapist and certified animal acupressure practitioner with 20+ years of equine health and training experience. Kim operates her business, Applied Integrative Therapy out of Rapid City, S.D., www.ait.massagetherapy.com.

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