



HOLISTIC HORSE bodyworks

Comprehensive Care. Tailored Solutions. Real Results.

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Equine Bodywork Basics Clinic



- **Introductions**
- **Agenda Review**
 - Approx 45-60 minutes each: hind end, back, front end and neck
 - A few key anatomy basics
 - Massage/bodywork moves
 - Stretches
- **Equine Vital Signs: What, Where and How**
- **Clinic Goals/Expected Outcomes**
- **Legal Disclaimer/Caveats**
- **Important Massage/Bodywork and Safety Guidelines**

NOTE: For our purposes today, bodywork includes all forms of massage, myofascial release, and craniosacral release.

- **Goals/expected outcomes**
 - Learn key contraindications for bodywork/stretchers and safety basics
 - Learn some important equine anatomy basics
 - Learn some key equine bodywork basics and stretches
 - Learn key equine vital signs
- **Legal Disclaimer/Caveat: The bodywork moves and stretches we will learn today can generally be done on a healthy, injury-free horse. However, not every bodywork move and/or stretch is appropriate for every horse. If any pain or discomfort is noted, STOP.**
- **Always consult an equine health care professional prior to beginning a bodywork and/or stretching regimen.**
- **Bodywork and stretching is complementary to veterinary care. It is not a substitute.**

Why is bodywork and stretching important for your horse regardless of discipline?

Key Bodywork and Stretching Guidelines

- Contraindications for all bodywork/stretching
 - Fever, elevated pulse, increased respiration
 - Weight bearing lame unless OK'd by vet
 - Skin lesions caused by infection
 - Loss of appetite; horse not drinking water
 - Typing up (acute phase)
 - Abnormal swelling unless OK'd by vet
 - Something is just "not right," and you think your horse is ill. Call the vet.
- Safety first...for both rider and horse!! Be aware of your surroundings prior to starting any bodywork and/or stretch and practice good ergonomics and body mechanics when doing bodywork and helping your horse stretch.
- Bodywork and stretches should always be done on warm muscles. Do not stretch a horse with cold muscles as that could cause tears, strains and other issues. Additionally, your horse won't get the full benefit of the stretch.
 - **What does this mean in terms of when you should stretch your horse?**

- **How can you warm up the muscles and keep them warm to do bodywork, especially when it is cold outside?**
- Some particular bodywork moves and/or stretches may be contraindicated (or need to be modified) for a given horse due to injury, conformation, age, current or past medical or dental condition or for a variety of other reasons. The frequency and type of bodywork and/or stretches that are appropriate for a horse recovering from an injury can vary greatly. Do not assume a bodywork move or other bodywork or stretch that was appropriate for a horse with an injury similar to your horse's injury is appropriate for your horse.
- This is a claw-hand free zone. Deep, slow breathing is also required. Breathing and relaxing your hands and body as much as possible is key. If you are tense, your horse is tense. (Same as riding.)
- No cheating when doing stretches.
 - Not standing square, turning hips, leaning backward, turning out limb or foot when not supposed to, bending a limb, locking a limb etc.
- Less stretch with proper form is better than more stretch with improper form!! ALWAYS!!
- Never hold or pull on a joint when doing bodywork or stretches.
- Never force a bodywork move or stretch. STOP if pain or discomfort is noted.
- It is common for one side of the body to have different ROM (range of motion) than the other side.

LET'S GET ROLLING.....

Assessment demo/discussion: History (verbal and written), specific issues/reason for visit, watch horse move especially pelvis, back, legs, neck, shoulders. Hands on assessment paying particular attention to the common "saddle soreness points" which are the withers pocket and the area behind the last rib. The feet are also very important. No hoof, no horse.

Types of Stokes We Are Covering Today

- Direct pressure—light, medium, (deep: not covered in this clinic). Never cause pain!!
- Cross fiber friction
- Wringing

Hind End

- Anatomy
 - Point of hip
 - Tensor Fascia Latae (TFL)
 - Stifle
 - Hamstrings (semitendinosus, gastrocnemius)
 - Quads (femoral, medial)
 - Digital extensors (long and lateral)
 - Deep digital flexor
 - Gluteal muscles (superficial, mid, bicep femoris)
 - Abductors (inner thigh in humans) (semimembranosus, gracilis, sartorius)
 - What parts of the spine are located in the hind end?
 - S6, CA 15-21
 - Pelvis: Is the pelvis level?
- Bodywork Moves
 - Hamstrings/Gluts
 - Abductor massage
 - Legs (digital extensors and flexors on opposite side)
 - TFL: “thumb tweedle”
- Stretches
 - Farrier—straight back, medial (toward mid-line), abducted (away from body)
 - Forward farrier—high, low, opposite side* (*very advanced, demo only)
 - Pelvic rock and hold

BACK (Important: Do NOT push on the spine.)

- Anatomy
 - What part of the spine is located in the back?
 - T18, L6
 - Long back muscle (Longissimus dorsi)
 - Intercostals
 - Where is the last rib? Locate and draw
 - How many ribs?
 - Shelf of ribs
 - Abdominals

- Selenium: What is it, and why is it so important?
- Bodywork Moves
 - Opening the back (bladder meridian)
 - Scissor
 - Palm/flat hand
 - Abdominal ironing
 - MFR (myofascial release) on junction of thoracic and lumbar spine
- Stretches
 - Belly lifts
 - Tail pull (only if tail is not in spasm)

EQUINE VITAL SIGNS

- What, where and how
- Important to know your horse's vital "normal" signs so you have baseline

FRONT END

- Anatomy
 - Scapula
 - Pecs (ascending, transverse/mid, descending)
 - Point of shoulder
 - Trapezius (superficial) and rhomboids (deep)
 - Leg flexors (back) and extensors (front) (carpal flexor, lateral ulnar, carpal extensor, digital extensors)
- Girths/Cinches: Just feel it!
- Bodywork Moves
 - Water gun (pecs)
 - Canoe (pecs)
 - Broadway (traps and rhomboids)
 - Leg down and up (bird head)
- Stretches
 - Bent leg circles and caudal (toward tail) stretch
 - Bent leg abduction

Neck

- Anatomy
 - Cervical spine
 - Nuchal ligament

- Neck muscles (splenius, cervical ventral serrated, brachiocephalicus, multifidus cervicis)
- Is the neck tight and/or not aligned?
- Bodywork Moves
 - Wringing the neck
 - Flat hand
 - Lollipop
- Stretches
 - Neck hug
 - Treat to point of hip/ treat to stifle
 - Treat on diagonal
 - Demo: C stretch
 - Demo: Crocodile stretch

Saddles

- A word about saddles, saddle fit and saddle pads: Not just a tush cush
 - Very important to overall horse and rider health and body but often overlooked
 - Can be the cause of lameness, pain, behavioral issues, muscle damage
 - Entire separate clinic so not covered today but critical!!

Questions??