



Canine Massage Therapy

By Loretta Swanson

Oh no, don't think that I didn't hear your eyes roll back in your head when you read the title of this column. I bet I know what you're thinking; "Massage, for my dog, you gotta be kiddin me!" Well, I'm not. If you will indulge me for a few minutes, I might be able to convince you that regular canine massage will not only compliment traditional veterinary care and help your dog live a long and healthy life, it might very well save you money, by preventing illness and injury, over the life of your dog.

How Does It Work?

Since massage looks and feels like pampering, many people automatically discount its value as a serious form of healthcare. Dog owners often fail to realize massage therapy is not merely glorified petting. The skilled manipulation of the soft tissues of the body can have a significant positive impact on virtually all of a dog's biological systems.

Massage is a vehicle that stimulates receptors in the skin which then release the chemicals necessary for the body's optimum performance. When skin receptors are stimulated they transmit messages to the brain. Once the brain receives these messages it initiates the production of chemicals that feed major body systems which include blood, muscles, nerve cells, tissues, and organs.

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The pressure of massage of the skin reaches underlying subcutaneous tissue and myofascia (the fibrous tissue that encloses and separates layers of muscle) which stimulates vagal nerve endings (the vagus nerve is an extremely long cranial nerve that extends from the brain stem to the internal organs of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis). The vagal nerve endings send signals to the brain that improve homeostasis (balance) of the autonomic nervous system.

Balance between the sympathetic (fight or flight) and parasympathetic (calming) nervous systems improve blood flow throughout the body and reduce inflammation, muscle tension, spinal cord pain.

Physical Benefits of Canine Massage

Some of the obvious physical benefits of canine massage include:

- Blood vessel dilation (which

Officers and Board Members

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Newsletter Editor

Carol Hunter
dalsncars@gmail.com
P.O. Box 382
Vernon AZ 85940
928-242-8464

allows blood to flow more freely, which in turn encourages the removal of waste products such as lymph and lactic acid)

- Stimulation of blood circulation which increases the amount of oxygen and nutrients reaching the bone and soft tissues. This is especially helpful in young animals, where the increased flow of blood to the bones will nourish the growing skeletal system.
- Pre-event massage to warm up muscle tissue to help prevent injury and promote focus in the dog.
- Post-event massage to help cool the dog down and aid in the prevention of lactic acid build-up that results in sore muscles.
- Strains, wounds, or blows to soft tissue can cause fibrous tissue adhesions beneath the skin, which can impede the proper movement of muscles but can be reduced by massage.
- Areas of muscle tension, swelling, and growths can be easily detected through regular massage.

But, did you know . . . ?

- Regular massage has been shown to reduce the output of stress hormones like ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone) and consequently aids in developing a resistance to infection in later life?
- In a young dog, it has been shown to promote the development of nerve pathways in the cortex and subcortex of the brain, which can result in an increased rate of learning?
- Massage aids in digestion,

one of the most important functions of the dog's body. Digestion can, quite literally, determine whether life continues or not. The stimulation of the vagus nerve through massage positively impacts digestion by:

- Improving gastric motility
 - Decreasing gut permeability
 - Increasing availability of nutrients from food
 - Regulating blood insulin levels
 - Promoting weight gain and growth rate
 - Improving the outlook for puppies suffering from failure to thrive
- Massage also has the potential to help older pets with digestive problems such as:
 - Post-operative ileus (temporary paralysis of a portion of the intestines after abdominal surgery)
 - Megaesophagus (a condition in which the muscles of the esophagus simply don't work and don't move food or liquid into the stomach)
 - Inflammatory bowel disease
 - Studies of obese rats indicate long-term vagal nerve stimulation through massage can lead to a reduction in food intake?
 - This suggests the vagal nerve network is capable of

sending satiety (I'm full) signals to the brain, effectively reducing appetite.

- From this we can assume regular massage has the potential to:
 - Reduce food cravings in your pet
 - Stimulate desire for more physical activity because his or her body feels better

Becker, K. "How This Hidden Technique Can Improve and Restore Your Pet's Health . . ." Mercola Healthy Pets. 11/18/2010. Accessed at on 09/28/2011.

Psychological Benefits of Canine Massage

In addition to the physical, massage provides enormous benefits for a pet's psychological well-being. Massage stimulates the release of beneficial neurotransmitters and reduces the production of stress hormones. The result is decreased anxiety and an enhanced sense of well-being. Dogs will bark and make more noise when they are restless, tense, hyperactive, or aggressive. A good massage helps them relax and ultimately makes them quieter by stimulating the peripheral and central portions of the nervous system to affect behavior patterns.

Often, we overlook the psychological need of dogs to feel a soothing touch. This is especially true with rescue dogs that may not have ever felt the loving touch of a human. Regular massage also helps to build confidence in shy and fearful dogs. We can't ignore the positive results for social and emotional health that massage provides. Consistent massage can help

to build a dog's self-confidence, sociability, and feelings of trust and belonging. These benefits are important to any dog, but priceless for those who have suffered abuse, neglect, or other emotional traumas.

All of the benefits of canine massage are simply too numerous to list, but the end result is positive to every system of your dog's body. Massage is a holistic form of care that acts upon the entire body in an effort to restore balance and increase the dog's overall wellness. Used in combination with regular

veterinary care, massage provides invaluable benefits for your favorite canine companions. Canine massage therapy should never be used as a substitute for veterinary medical care. However, when used in combination with regular veterinary medical care, it can help enhance the life of your dog.

Want to read more about it?

Canine Massage: The Workbook by Patricia Whalen-Shaw with Mickey Young.

Canine Massage: A Complete Reference Manual by Jean-Pierre Hourdebaigt.

Dog Anatomy: A Coloring Atlas by Robert A. Kainer and Thomas O. McCracken.
The Healing Touch for Dogs: The Proven Massage Program for Dogs, Revised Edition, by Michael W. Fox.

Loretta Swanson has completed over 400 hours of canine massage therapy training and will be completing her national certification test this fall.

A Wish Fulfilled by LaDonna King

Was there ever something that you always wished that you could do? From the time I got my very first dog, I had a dream. My dream was to someday have a Dalmatian that I could do pet therapy with. In those early days I didn't have the skills to either choose the right temperament in a dog or the skills to train a dog for that kind of work.

I had not grown up around dogs. I raised my children without dogs. My children grew up and left home. Oh my, now what? On a whim I decided I needed a pet. At the age of 45 I got my first dog. You guessed it, that dog was a Dalmatian. I didn't have a fence, I didn't have a crate, I didn't have any dog food, and I didn't have a clue what to do with a dog. As time went by I started to learn about training, showing and breeding. I loved all of that, but my real dream was to be able to share my dogs in a pet therapy setting.

Each time a dog came into my life I would think, maybe this is the dog I can do therapy work with. It seemed that there was always some problem that I faced that prevented that dog

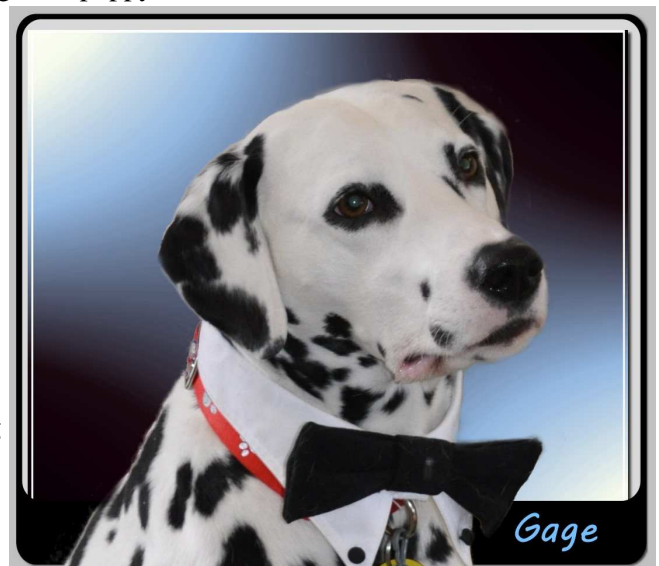
from being a good therapy prospect, too aggressive, too shy, and much too exuberant and on and on.

On December 10th of 2005, along with my co-breeder Barb Allison, I was blessed with a lovely litter of twelve puppies. I had not intended to keep a puppy from that litter but fate had other plans for me and one of those puppies. I did keep a lovely little boy and named him Kingdom's Twist of Fate. We call him Gage. When Gage was just six weeks old we had the opportunity to visit an assisted living home. What fun it was to share that darling little puppy with the residents and see the smiles on their faces as they held him in their arms. We enjoyed it so much that we continued to visit each week as the folks watched Gage grow and learn. We went to classes and learned new behaviors. When he turned a year old he took the CGC and therapy dog test. We were finally official. The residents followed Gage's show

career and celebrated each ribbon on his way to his AKC and UKC championships.

He is nearly six years old now and is very much loved by his "old people". When the AKC decided to recognize therapy work with a new title, Gage was among the very first to receive his title. It has been a fun ride and a dream fulfilled.

AKC/UKC CH Kingdom's Twist of Fate, CGC, TDI, ThD



Whelping Box, Puppies and Brags



Peggy Ann Strupp brags, "Luan", Aberdeen's Let's Make A Deal, LUA Dal bred by Denise Powell & owned by Peggy Ann Strupp, is in training as a coach dog. Along with regular obedience training, Luan is learning to follow a horse for trail rides, Road Trials, and

parades. Luan participated in her first parade in September in Alexander, North Dakota. Luan trotted alongside the horse during a parade down the main streets. In the photo, Luan is on the horse's left. Dog on right: CH Koira Redrock Rada-gast the Brown, CD, RD, RDX, RN. Horse: Shadowfax. Rider: Peggy Ann Strupp (riding sidesaddle).

From Judy Dugan, Webster got the first leg of his UKC Open title with a first place on Aug. 28th at Cross Roads Canine Club in Dayton Ohio. He got the last two legs of his UKC Rally level 3 with a third and fourth place on September 18th at Metro Louisville Training Club in Floyds Knobs Indiana. He is very proud of his BLUE ribbon - we don't have too many of those. We also "played" in the AKC Utility ring on August 13th & 14th. He shall try Utility again the end of October.

The local Louisville Bully Breed Rescue hosted a "Pitty Fairness" event the end of July. Webster went to show his support for his fellow canines and we got our picture taken with "Shorty" from the "Pit Boss" show on Animal Planet.

Judy Dugan &
UCD, UR03 Siobahn Wide Receiver, CDX, RAE, CGC



Amy Marrich brags, The weekend of his 4th Birthday, Cubby finished his UKC Grand Championship in two weekends out after a two year break from showing. He took 3 Group 1st, a Group 2 and was Reserve BIS. So Cubby is now officially BIS Intl Ch U-GrCh U-RO1 Woodwynd Dotter's Eagle Scout RD.



Barb Allison brags, On 9/11/11 nine new LUA babies were born! The father is Ch Rim Rock Stocklore Mystic Maks (UU) and the mother is INT CH / AKC GCH / U-GRCH Rim Rock N Siobahn Keepin Bizzi. Both parents have their CHIC numbers and all the puppies have black spots. We have 5 boys (3 patched) and 4 girls (1 patch). The can be seen on the Maks-Bizzi blog at <http://maks-bizzi.blogspot.com/> I update it daily so check it out watch the babies grow!



DNA

Here are some great web pages with more info about our ambitious project:

www.luadalmatians.com

www.dalmatianheritage.com

www.ukcdogs.com

<http://normaldals.blogspot.com/>

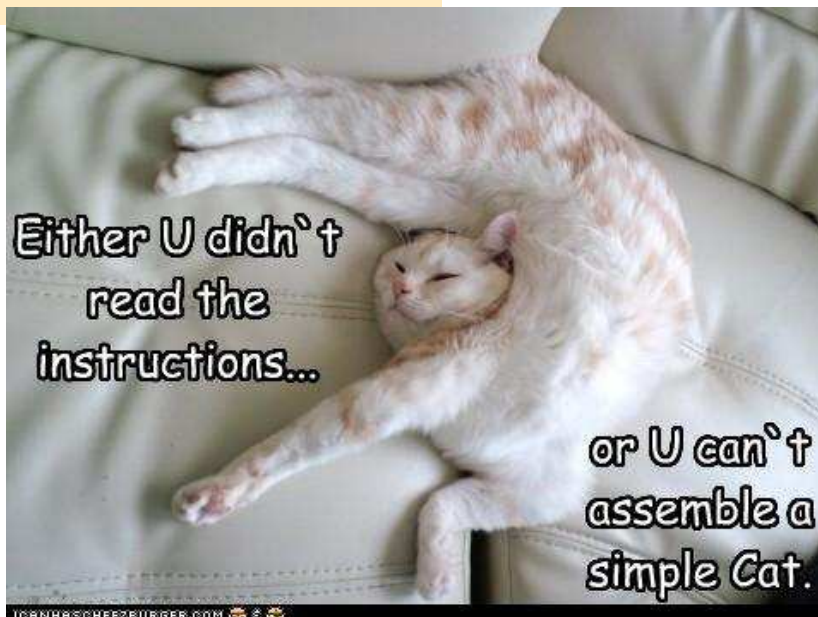
Check us out on YouTube! <http://www.youtube.com/user/UKCDalmatians>

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A Little Humor, or not

Are You A Dog Person?

You carry pictures of your dog in your wallet instead of pictures of your parents, siblings, significant other, or anyone else remotely human.

You keep eating even after finding a dog hair in your pasta.

You never completely finish a piece of food (so your dog gets a taste, too).

You like people who like your dog.
You despise people who don't.

