

## **Massage Therapy**

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Animal Massage has been around as long as grooming and petting...actually grooming and petting are the earliest forms of massage in animals. By definition, animal massage is the use of pressure administered by hand in various forms to the musculoskeletal system with the intention of facilitating good health.

Interest in the field of animal massage has been on the rise over the last decade or so. Many countries and some states in the U.S. recognize massage as a health care service for animals. Who are the people providing this service and what are the benefits to the animal?

Massage therapists are only one group of people who provide massage for animals. Veterinarian technicians, horse guardians and trainers, physical therapists and others offer massage for relaxation, well-being and rehabilitation when appropriate. Each country or state has its own guidelines regarding training and recognition of practitioners. Although massage is an old tradition, it is still considered a fairly new "science". Consequently many states in the U.S. are still defining its use and standards of practice.

Massage is believed to facilitate health and balance in many ways. Massage eases tension in the soft tissues, promotes good circulation, provides relaxation and stimulates the function of the immune system. Today, massage may be used for competition horses and dogs the same way it is used by professional athletes. Due to advances in veterinarian care many companion animals live longer lives and massage can be a helpful tool in maintaining an animal's youthful exuberance.

Many excellent books are available on the subject and information on the world wide web is abundant. Anyone interested in a career in animal massage should begin by spending time around animals. It is necessary to understand anatomy, physiology, biomechanics and massage techniques relevant to the type of animal you wish to work with. Most animal massage programs offer these topics as well as animal behavior, first aid and handling, proper stretching techniques and related subjects.