

Alternative Therapies for Injuries in Horses

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Alternative therapy modalities and treatments for injuries in horses are an expanding area in both clinical use and scientific work. Incorporating these treatments for our equine patients is often based on successful application in human or canine patients that are translated for use in horses. These are utilized for a variety of problems and can compliment traditional therapies when your horse suffers from injury. Though not inclusive of all treatments available, here is an overview of some of the more common modalities and treatments.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a treatment that originated in ancient China. It requires the insertion of thin needles into specific points to correct imbalances in the flow of "qi" (pronounced "chi"). Practitioners of Chinese Medicine describe qi as the energy flow or life force that moves through the body along meridians. By inserting the needles in appropriate locations the energy flow can be changed in order to treat a variety of conditions. In horses, acupuncture has been used for everything from gastrointestinal disorders to lameness. Scientific studies have proven some efficacy, but it is a methodology that can be difficult to fully study. Practitioners therefore rely heavily on clinical response to therapy. Acupuncture can be combined with traditional veterinary therapies for a multitude of maladies. When considering acupuncture for your horse be sure to find a veterinarian certified in veterinary acupuncture. Resources for finding a certified veterinary acupuncturist include www.tcv.com and www.ivas.org.

Chiropractic

In humans, chiropractic is best known for spinal manipulation. In actuality, chiropractic focuses on the whole neuromuscular system, joint mobility, soft tissues, nutrition, and a healthy lifestyle. Animal chiropractic also looks to treat spinal alignment issues as well as other disorders of the neuromuscular system. Both veterinarians and human chiropractors can be certified to treat animals by receiving post-graduate education in animal chiropractic, and then testing to become certified through the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association. Like with acupuncture you want to be sure to find a specially trained and certified animal chiropractor. Listings of trained and certified chiropractors can be found at www.animalchiropractic.org.

Low-level laser therapy

Low-level laser therapy is also known as the cold laser and therapeutic laser. Laser is a light or phototherapy. The therapeutic laser devices emit light at infra-red levels to the area being treated. The laser light, which is at a specific wave-length, interacts with tissue at a cellular level. It works to decrease inflammation and stimulate tissues to heal. In humans this therapy has been extensively studied, but less work has been done in animals. Clinically it appears to be effective for treatment of many types of musculoskeletal pain, wounds, swelling, pain associated with acute injury and arthritis, tendon and ligament injury, and nerve injury.

Therapeutic Ultrasound

Most horse owners are familiar with ultrasound, diagnostic ultrasound that is. Diagnostic ultrasound is often used to diagnose soft tissue injuries by using sound

waves that are processed to produce an image of the structure being evaluated, like a tendon or ligament. Therapeutic ultrasound also utilizes sound waves, but in a different way. The sound waves generated by a therapeutic ultrasound machine penetrate the tissue and provide deep heating as well as interact with tissue on a cellular level. This deep heating is useful in increasing blood flow to the target tissue to stimulate healing. Ultrasound has also been utilized to increase range of motion of joints, help with tendon contracture, and decrease muscle spasm due to its tissue heating properties. Other areas it is used for is bone healing, especially in non-union fractures, wound healing, tendon and ligament injuries, and muscle spasm.

The area of physical rehabilitation and therapy is an expanding area in horses. With development of the new veterinary specialty, The American College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation (www.vsmr.org) we should see more rapid scientific and clinical advances in the field. These advances will allow us to optimize the performance of the equine athlete and their recovery from injury.

Contact Brandon Equine Medical Center at 813-643-7177 or email info@brandonequine.com with any questions regarding this topic.

This article originally appeared in Horse & Pony magazine in December, 2012 and is reprinted with their permission.