**Dog Massage Preparation**

Dog massage uses much the same techniques as human massage. It is beneficial for many reasons. Dog massage can:

* Increase circulation (reduces swelling, breaks down adhesions)
* Improves flexibility (range of motion)
* Soothes muscle pain (eases and relaxes muscle; works out lactic acid)
* Relieve stress (reduces tension)
* Improves attitude and ability to focus
* Eliminates toxins in the body
* Improve autoimmune response
* Increases the bond between you and your dog
* Allows early detection of problems (bumps, lesions, hot areas)
* Can relieve age related problems
* Promotes healthy skin and coat by distributing natural oils
* Improves posture and balance
* Massage releases endorphins
* It is beneficial to both the dog and the masseuse. It makes both parties feel good.

**Dog massage involves various techniques as used with human massage:**

* Effleurage (long, slow strokes)
* Petrissage (kneading)
* Percussion (drumming/tapping with fingers or hands)
* Palpation (friction – similar to T-touch, where only the skin moves)
* Thumb Glide
* Compressions
* Rolling
* Stroking
* Pressure

**Handler needs to know:**

* **How structure relates to soundness** (If a dog is not "put together well," it will affect his ability to move around in a pain-free world.  A dog with bad or improperly aligned hips or lack of angulation, for example will develop a way of walking which may put more pressure on the other limbs/joints, or spine, making the muscles tire and making them sore.)
* **How problems will affect dog’s appearance** (If a dog has a pulled muscle, or if he only develops muscle tone in one side (say he has a nervous habit of always spinning to the right), he may look pulled toward one side, or may be tight in one side, or his spine may look crooked.)
* **The dog’s muscle groups and what they do** (Muscles in the head aid in biting, chewing and eating.  Neck muscles are used a lot in playing (tugging, shaking a toy).  The extremity muscles are used mostly for ambulation (running, playing).  The torso (chest and back) muscles aid in flexibility (ability to perform agility and turns or spins).
* **How to observe dog’s movement/behavior to spot problems** (To observe your dog's natural movement, have someone else trot him toward and away from you.  You should see his legs come together toward his mid-line as he moves faster, forming a "single-track."  If your dog is moving wide in the front (paddling) or wide in the rear, and unable to trot correctly or single-track, there may be structural problems.  Also view from the side as someone trots your dog.  You should not see the skin and muscles of the torso roll back and forth from one side to the other.  If it does, this could indicate overweight or poor muscle tone, or that the dog is pacing instead of trotting.  Pacing (walking with both right legs and both left legs moving at the same time) could indicate a structural problem, too, like over-reaching (the back legs are hitting the front legs when they trot, so the dog moves both right and both left together to avoid stepping on the front paws with the back ones).
* **How to create/demonstrate the use of a post-massage “map” telling what you did/found.** (Take the drawing of the side and top views of the dog that you have been provided with, and indicate with arrows or coloring in with colored pencils/markers where there were any spots that were hot, stiff, and/or resistant to range of motion flexion and extension.  Indicate any sensitive areas or ticklish areas as well. Make notes on the drawing as needed, to facilitate your explaining to the owner (if you are not the owner) what you found in examining and massaging the dog, or if you are the owner, make these notes to help you remember what areas needed extra work, so you will be able to monitor improvements or deterioration.)

**Other types of touch:**

**T-Touch** is not massage, but is manipulation of the skin and body tissues, which is very beneficial.

**Acupressure** benefits the subject through pressure applied to special pressure points that relate to another system or part of the body.

**Other tips:**

Most canine massages are done “dry” (no oils), because it would be very sticky and hairy to use oils.

Massage vibrators may be too intense for canines. Although they do have mild ones that are encased in a stuffed (fiber filled) ball, which just applies a gentle vibration.

**Do:**

* Work in a quiet, peaceful environment.
* Have your dog lie on a mat on the floor or on a raised surface, which ever you are both the most comfortable with (dogs tend to be more at ease on the floor).
* Ask permission before you begin.
* Stop if the dog shows discomfort, or is mentally “done.”
* Perform massage when you and the dog are in the right frame of mind (relaxed and calm). Choose to work on the dog when you are mindful and present. Meaning: Touch with intent requires your full attention and focus on the animal and how you are touching them. Leave the worries of the day behind or plan your day in your head when you are finished with the session.
* Breathe!  Breathing is very important. Not only does it nourish your body with more oxygen, breathing triggers the parasympathetic nervous system which helps to calm the body. When you breathe your dog breathes. When you hold your breath your dog/cat will sense a lack of calm energy.
* Keep one hand on the dog at all times. As you pick one hand up to move it, make sure your other hand is on the animal, maintaining constant contact.

**Don’t:**

* Do not massage areas that are swollen, cold, or hot without diagnosis to prevent further injury.
* Do not massage hot spots, tumors, infected areas, cuts and abrasions, surgical incisions, or any area where your animal shows signs of discomfort or pain.
* Bones are not massaged, as this can cause your animal discomfort.
* Stay away from the spine and joints.
* Never massage an animal that is bleeding, has low blood pressure, fever, poisoning, severe trauma, severe debilitation, in shock, heat stroke, a leg where there may be circulatory problem due to thrombosis (blood clots), or an injury or illness not diagnosed by a vet.
* Never force a pet into receiving a massage. The dog should be a willing participant. Let the animal know what it is that you intend to do in a soft and soothing voice.
* Do not massage after breeding or on a pregnant female without veterinary direction.
* No percussion over the kidneys as it may cause damage
* Do not massage right before or right after the animal has eaten a meal.

**Dogs need to:**

* Hold still for massage
* Get onto massage mat/table willingly
* Lie on side on cue
* Allow handling of all body parts
* Allow a massage to be performed on them without tension

**Handlers need to:**

* Enumerate benefits of massage
* Define types of massage techniques and how to do them
* Know when not to massage an animal
* Know which muscles are where on the dog, and what they control
* Know how massage differs from T-Touch and acupressure
* Know how structure relates to soundness and how problems will affect dog’s appearance
* Know how to observe dog’s movement and behavior to determine if problems exist
* Know how to make a post-massage “map” of what you did and found