

Healthy Joints

Joint Health: Osteopathy and Dogs

THERE IS nothing more pleasing to the eye than a well structured and co-ordinated dog gliding gracefully about the show ring; or to watch the pet dog or canine athlete move with ease and good muscle balance.

Whilst many of our breeds are blighted by genetic, developmental and degenerative joint issues, there is much that can be done to help prevent problems occurring and to help animals cope optimally with inherited or acquired musculoskeletal dysfunction.

Osteopathy can play a huge role in not only helping specific problems but improving and maintaining good condition of the muscles and joints of our dogs, thus enhancing mobility, flexibility and quality of life.



Daisy – great pose!

What is Osteopathy?

Osteopathy is an established and well recognised health care profession seeking to restore normal function and mobility, enhancing healing and reducing pain. It is commonly used with conditions of the musculoskeletal system which may result from trauma or disease. It is a system of manual therapy; and part of the uniqueness of osteopathy is the highly developed skill of palpation and manual methods of treatment employed which are carefully adapted to suit each patient.

A regulated profession

Osteopathy is a regulated profession which is governed by the General Osteopathic Council. Osteopaths undergo a 4 year full-time (in some schools this is 5 year part-time) course of study covering the core medical sciences.

Osteopathy and animals

Registered Osteopaths who work with animals train in and work in human practice before specialising with animals. The vast expertise developed in the human field enables osteopaths to adapt these skills to animals. In addition, osteopaths who work with animals undertake post-graduate education in the treatment of animals. The Society of Osteopaths in Animal Practice (SOAP) is the main provider of large and small animal post-graduate osteopathic education, along with the University accredited MSc in Animal Manipulation, Osteopathic Pathway. Osteopaths who work with animals must comply with the Veterinary Act of 1966 and

obtain veterinary permission before treating an animal.

Physiological basis of osteopathy

Fundamental osteopathic principles are based on the belief that structure governs function; so normal health and mobility will be determined by the structure perhaps of a specific joint or the conformation of the animal. Osteopaths look at the body as a unit and consider the inter-connection of the component structures in relationship to the whole animal. A good blood supply, venous and lymphatic drainage are essential not only to the health of muscles and joints but every organ in the body. Blood supply, venous and lymphatic drainage are stimulated by osteopathic treatment. The transmission of synovial fluid within a joint is also promoted by osteopathic techniques.

Methods of treatment

Osteopathy uses manual methods of treatment adapted from human practice as well as those developed specifically for the dog. These techniques are gentle and include soft tissue (massage) work to muscles and fascia; stretching techniques; joint mobilisations and articulations which help improve range of movement; 'functional' techniques which help release fascia, muscles and joints; and specific joint manipulation. Osteopathic treatment is generally well received and enjoyed by dogs and will often lead to a nicely relaxed dog.



Effects of Osteopathy

It is very common for owners to report a notable improvement in their dog's demeanour following treatment in that they are often much brighter in themselves and more willing and able to exercise. Osteopathic treatment helps reduce pain, facilitates healing and improves flexibility and mobility. In the working or competition dog, 'canine athlete' or show dog, performance is enhanced.

Scope of Osteopathy

Any animal can be seen by an osteopath provided the osteopath has

sought and acquired veterinary permission. Osteopaths can help dogs cope with many problems and conditions affecting the musculoskeletal system. These include soft tissue injuries incurred through trauma, overuse and stresses and strains related to poor conformation; as well as the musculoskeletal consequences of developmental and degenerative conditions. Hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and other forms of osteochondrosis are common developmental conditions suffered by dogs. Degenerative conditions include osteoarthritis of the peripheral joints: hip, stifle, shoulder etc and spinal joint problems (intervertebral disc disease). The osteopath will consider the dog as a whole as well as addressing the local issue. Osteopaths may also work with performance, competition, working dogs and 'canine athletes', maintaining good muscle balance, joint health, co-ordination and flexibility and dealing with any minor injuries or imbalances that may arise.

Team work

Osteopaths are keen to involve you, the owner, in aftercare advice and education for your dog. Osteopaths will also communicate with your dog's veterinary surgeon, thus ensuring the best possible care.

About the author

Sharon Winkler provides osteopathic treatment for people and small animals, mainly dogs and cats. Her small animal work is undertaken at The Bishops Veterinary Surgery in Hatfield, Hertfordshire. She is an active member of the Society of Osteopaths in Animal Practice (SOAP) lecturing and promoting osteopathy and the treatment of animals. For further information on osteopathy for dogs, please contact Sharon Winkler or SOAP:

Sharon Winkler BSc (Hons) Ost.
Tel: 01707 257880. www.sharonwinkler.co.uk

Society of Osteopaths in Animal Practice (SOAP).
Tel: 01242 221153. www.uksoap.org.uk

