



# Canine Myofunctional Therapy

We all know just how relaxing and therapeutic a massage can be for us humans and it's just the same for our dogs. **Tim Falk** reports.

AT DOGS LIFE, WE'RE ALWAYS HAPPY to bring you information about alternative therapies that offer a slightly different approach to traditional veterinary medicine to help treat a range of canine conditions. From herbal remedies to acupuncture, there are heaps of different therapies and techniques out there that offer new ways to help your sick or injured dog.

Canine Myofunctional Therapy (CMT) is one such field. Mention it to most people and you'll be met with a blank stare, "Canine what?" being a pretty common reply.

Myofunctional actually means muscle function and CMT is a gentle therapeutic massage exclusively for dogs. We all know that massage can work wonders on

stressed and sore human shoulders, so transferring this over to our canine friends seems like a fairly logical step.

CMT assists the muscles of the body to relax and/or repair, increases oxygen and blood flow and can be used to help your pooch recover from an injury or ease aching muscles in older dogs.

Sue Parncutt is a Canine Myofunctional Therapist from 101 Palpatations whose interest in the field developed when she was looking to improve the health of her ailing Kelpie Olive who was suffering from an autoimmune disorder. *Dogs Life* spoke to Parncutt to find out what this therapy is all about.

"CMT is similar to massage and can be used either to enhance muscle function

by working to repair specific muscles or, alternatively, to relax tired and aching muscles. It is similar to human massage in that myofunctional therapy aims to repair muscles and remedial aims to relax," she says.

Massage therapists can assist with the healing of injuries as well as correct gait and lameness issues. Massage also sends messages to the brain receptors to repair damaged tissue, evacuates old blood and encourages fresh blood to flow. "It can also alleviate nerve issues that can compromise the body's ability to function properly," Parncutt explains.

She says myofunctional massage can be of huge benefit to most dogs and 99 per cent of canines enjoy the treatment and relax into it once they realise it is not going to hurt them. "Of the clients I see, I would say that the majority are over eight years old and are getting a little stiff.

## Benefits of CMT

- ★ Encourages relaxation
- ★ Increases blood circulation
- ★ Improves dog's flexibility and range of movement
- ★ Reduces tension
- ★ Provides pain relief
- ★ Eliminates waste and toxins
- ★ Improves muscle tone

It is excellent therapy that allows dogs to become more familiar with their own body," she says.

"I see dogs that are highly strung and not used to touch totally change their demeanour and become more trusting and tactile. It is one of the most rewarding jobs, particularly when the feedback from the owners is so positive. I often hear them say, 'I can't believe how relaxed he is now and has stopped being nervous.' It can also help a dog assimilate mentally and get rid of fear aggression."

The non-invasive treatment starts with effleurage, a gentle and soothing stroke that softens the skin and muscles to prepare the dog for more active techniques. As the dog gradually becomes more relaxed, deeper muscle work is applied to break down adhesions, increase blood flow, eliminate toxins and provide relief for built-up aches and pains.

## 101 Palpatations

To get in touch with Sue Parncutt, log on to [www.101palpatations.com.au](http://www.101palpatations.com.au) or phone 0408 886 613.

CMT can be especially beneficial for dogs suffering injuries or recovering from an operation. Injuries that may have been present for a while and gone untreated affect the opposing and surrounding muscle groups. They restrict blood flow, inhibit the repair and elasticity of surrounding tissue and interfere with nerve and muscle fibres. They can also result in referred pain and strain in other areas as the body tries to compensate for the injury. Muscle adhesions, spasms and general soreness are also likely to have developed by this stage.

CMT doesn't necessarily have to be

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Massage can be used to help the muscles of the body relax and repair.

used on sore or injured dogs; it can help to prevent injury in working dogs and keep them in top condition. Some also suggest it is a good way for young, timid dogs to get used to being handled by a person.

Parncutt says there are definitely benefits in getting show dogs massaged prior to events. "It helps to make the dog stand taller and brighter, as well as making the coat look shinier. Personally, I would give the dog a day or two for the bodywork to settle before a show; however, there are plenty of dogs that get treated on the way to a show," she explains.

"One of the biggest benefits of CMT is in actually being able to isolate where the exact problem is stemming from," Parncutt says. "I quite often get referrals from vets when they are unable to figure out what the problem is; sometimes X-rays, blood tests and consults fail to find the reason.

"A lot of vets have said they don't actually know a lot about musculoskeletal issues as they tend to concentrate on diseases rather than muscles and automation. By going over every inch of the body during massage, it is more often than not the therapist who is able to isolate the point of injury."

Parncutt points out that if a dog has a skeletal problem (such as hip dysplasia, cruciate disease or torn ligaments or tendons), it is important to have a vet check-up prior to massage to make sure treatment will be suitable.

It is also essential to know if the dog is on medication and for what condition. "If a dog has cancer, for instance, massage is not a good idea as it encourages the cancer to spread at a cellular level and can often speed up the process. I would not massage a dog undergoing chemotherapy or radiation for that reason, but would recommend it at approximately three to four months after treatment," Parncutt says.

There are also plenty of gentle techniques that people can try out on their dogs at home. "The main thing is to massage in the direction of the hair, starting at the head and working through the body then the legs. I find it gives better results. The pressure should only be light, getting deeper as the massage progresses," Parncutt tells *Dogs Life*.

"It's hard to explain how to do it, but I think a good masseuse should generally leave the owner with a few tips and techniques they can adapt for themselves.

"However, like any trained masseuse, our hands generally tell us more because we do it more often over a greater range of dogs."