

Chiropractic Treatments

In recent years the use of alternative therapies in equine medicine has almost doubled. Therapeutic options such as Acupuncture and chiropractic performed by properly trained individuals can complement the treatment protocol and aid in the getting the horse back to optimal health and performance.

The majority of lameness issues that we see in our equine practice are caused by lower limb abnormalities. However when a horse is lame, they will start to carry themselves differently in order to “get off” the sore limb. In doing so, they use different back muscles and neck muscles. Depending on how long this goes on, several areas of the animal can begin to hurt. It is just like if we were to drop a heavy object on the big toe of our left foot. The toe is the number one source of pain. If we had to continue to walk on that sore toe, we would compensate by putting more weight on our right hip, back, shoulders, and neck. If we did this for very long, soon the pain in our sore toe may be gone, but we are left with very sore muscles and joints in other areas of our bodies. In most cases anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin and ibuprofen do not alleviate all the pain and we are left with stomach ulcers from too many non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. This can also happen to our horse patients. It is a little difficult for them to tell us exactly where things hurt. But if we look, there are some subtle signs.

Horses with conditions that might respond to chiropractic treatment can display some of the following signs:

- Loss or decrease in level of performance;
- Reduced neck or back flexibility;
- Localized muscle tightness;
- Uneven or asymmetric gait;
- Recent change in spinal conformation (such as an arched back, scoliosis (curve), or sway back);
- Discomfort with saddle placement or tightening of the cinch or girth;
- Stiffness and more warm-up needed;
- Behavioral changes (refusals, cinchy, bucking)
- Lameness only when ridden;
- Difficulty with a lead or gait transition;
- Consistently stumbling and/or toe dragging;

- Muscle mass asymmetry;
- Pelvic asymmetry;
- Not standing squarely on all four limbs;
- Difficulty standing for the farrier;
- Holding the tail to one side;

If the horse is showing one or more of these signs, it may be in need of a chiropractic adjustment. The horse should have a full lameness and health examination by a licensed veterinarian. If the condition has been a long progressive process, sometimes the original source of pain is gone (just like our sore toe!). However, if the horse has been compensating for the pain, he may be left with specific sore areas in his back, hips, shoulders, ribs, and neck. At this point a chiropractic adjustment may be necessary. You should follow the advice of your veterinarian and only seek help from an individual who has been properly trained in the chiropractic methods for animals.

In 1989, a program called Options for Animals was started in Illinois. This program is available to licensed veterinarians or chiropractors. The program has grown and developed to its own campus now located south of Kansas City. It consists of over 210 hours of classroom and hands on training of horses and small animals. After each of the five, five day long sessions, there is a written and practical examination. When participants have completed the course, they are eligible to become certified by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association. This association was started to supervise individuals who perform animal chiropractic. Beware of imitations! There may be people out there that say they are trained in animal chiropractic. However, there are some very specific moves and techniques and if not properly employed, can cause permanent damage.