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Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine in Sport and Companion Animals

Massada Marta*

Department of Orthopaedics and Traumatology, Aristotle Hospital de Santo Antonio, Portugal

Introduction

Soft tissue mobilization is often employed in the treatment of sport and companion animals. However, there is some ambiguity about the usefulness and effectiveness of these treatments. As a result, the goal of this systematic literature review was to analyze the evidence for clinical effects of massage and stretching in cats, dogs and horses. Web of Science Core Collection, CABI and PubMed were used to conduct a bibliographic search confined to research on cats, dogs and horses. Relevant papers were evaluated for scientific quality and data on research characteristics, species, treatment type, indication and treatment effects were retrieved. 11 of the 1189 distinct publications evaluated were suitable for inclusion.

Description

Soft tissue mobilization is an umbrella term for a variety of manual procedures used to alter various soft tissue layers, namely the skin, muscular, fascial and tendon components. Massage, trigger point therapy, myofascial release and stretching are some examples of manual therapeutic procedures. Massage has been used since ancient times and is described as "manipulation of tissues (as by rubbing, kneading, or tapping) with the hand or an instrument for relaxation or therapeutic reasons" or "mechanical stimulation of soft tissues." Massage techniques range from moderate stroking to deep and violent kneading of tissues and they can be used separately or in combination [1].

Soft tissue mobilisation is used to relieve muscular tension, discomfort and stress while also increasing blood and lymphatic circulation and tissue suppleness. It is also employed in scar tissue remodelling to facilitate minimum adhesion formation and the creation of optimally functioning scar formation. Soft tissue mobilisation has recently been used to promote relaxation and a greater level of wellbeing. These benefits are defined as "overall relaxation" or "stress alleviation," rather than relaxing tight soft tissues or enhancing performance. As a result, soft tissue mobilisation therapies might be classified as either clinical or wellness-promoting [2].

Soft tissue mobilisation can be performed by qualified specialists as well as by laypeople and animal owners. Massage is extensively employed in both companion animals and sport horses, according to research. Massage was utilized in 8% of the horses treated for lameness and back issues in a research on Swiss warm blood horses. According to a New Zealand survey, 26% of dressage riders utilise various sorts of massage for their horses, with back issues being the most common reason for employing allied health staff to treat their horse. A Swedish research found similar results, demonstrating that massage is mostly utilised to treat back and muscular disorders in horses [3].

Despite the fact that soft tissue mobilisation is commonly employed, there is little agreement on its clinical effects in animals. To the best of the writers' knowledge, just a handful previous story reviews have been published. As a result, the current study's goal is to perform a thorough literature review on soft tissue mobilisation treatments. The current study is part of a series of systematic review articles in a Special Issue of Animals on complementary and alternative veterinary medicine (CAVM) treatments used in sport and companion animals. Other articles will address manipulation/mobilization treatments, electrotherapies, therapeutic ultrasound, extracorporeal shock wave therapy, laser therapy, acupuncture and "other therapies."

The quantity of data on the therapy techniques discussed in this study is clearly quite limited. Massage has a bigger number of articles than stretching. The investigations, however, are largely concerned with general physiological impacts rather than effects on specific clinical indications [4].

The current analysis, however, suggests that diverse massage techniques elicit a drop in heart rate and an increase in behavioral signals associated to relaxation based on research of poor to moderate quality. These findings are consistent with research on people and animal models, which reveal that changes in autonomic tone result in a decrease in heart rate, a decrease in blood pressure, an increase in relaxation-related chemicals such as hormones and an increase in heart rate variability.

However, the usage of the term "massage" in the title of the study may be deceptive. Specificity in the usage of terms linked to soft tissue mobilizations is required. Regardless of the soft tissue mobilisation technique used, it is vital to remember that touch may be enjoyable and can reveal anomalies that would otherwise go undetected. However, whether treating disease or damage, the advantages of a treatment must be rigorous [5].

Conclusion

Massage has the most articles reporting on its effects of the two modalities covered in this evaluation. Having stated that, several of the papers have a significant risk of bias. Furthermore, the result measurements employed, as well as the massage techniques used, are vastly diverse. Randomized controlled and blinded studies with appropriate statistical power are required to acquire a better understanding of the impact of the procedures on healthy sport and companion animals, as well as animals with diseases.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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***Address for Correspondence:** Massada Marta, Department of Orthopaedics and Traumatology, Hospital de Santo Antonio, Portugal, E-mail: massadamarta12@gmail.com*

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