

Myofascial Equine Therapy

by John F. Barnes, PT

Special to PT Today

I have had a deep love of animals all of my life. As I have moved through my career I began to apply the myofascial principles to various types of animals with great success. I have treated dogs, cats and horses. As you can imagine, it gives one tremendous satisfaction to help an animal friend in trouble.

I have treated many types of equine athletes: standardbreds and thoroughbreds, eventing, jumpers and dressage horses. These are high-performance horses whose trainers/owners have been told that there is nothing else that can be done by veterinary medicine or traditional therapy and that if the owner would continue to race these horses they would go lame and have to be destroyed. Their advice was to end the animals' career and put the horses "out to pasture."

These horses were brought to me and I applied the myofascial principles and techniques. Every one of these horses responded and are now racing and performing, with many winning ribbons and breaking records. Myofascial release is the "missing link" in treatment for human and equine athletes.

EVALUATION AND TREATMENT

I would like to share with you an example of my evaluation and treatment of a two-year-old racehorse that had tremendous potential and conformation. However, every time his trainers ran him he broke down and went lame within 100-150 yards.

This equine athlete was seen by numerous veterinarians at the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center located in Kennett Square, one of the leading veterinary centers in the world. They tried everything veterinary science had to offer with no success and told the owner that there was no hope for improvement.

He was a beautiful, powerfully built horse with excellent conformation. His gait analysis demonstrated that he veered off mid-line to the left, had reduced forward swing of the left hind limb with excessive internal rotation upon hoof strike, and reduced fluidity of motion of the left fore leg and mid-cervical regions.

MYOFASCIAL/OSSEOUS ANALYSIS

There was restriction of motion of the left sacroiliac, and anterior rotation of the left ilea with resultant internal rotation of the left femur. Myofascial restrictions and compensation were found in the left psoas, hamstring and quadriceps areas. Compression of the lumbosacral junction was found, in addition to osseous restrictions with resultant range-of-motion loss and tenderness in the left cervical 3 and 4. Compensating myofascial restrictions were found in the left trapezius, supraspinatus and triceps areas.

Myofascial release, myofascial/osseous mobilization techniques, myofascial unwinding and movement facilitation procedures were administered to the painful and restricted areas. Immediately after treatment, I asked his trainer to take the horse out and run him on the track. The trainer was astonished to find that he ran a mile for the first time in his life. He subsequently went into earnest training, running four miles in good time and went on to win races in record time.

The results produced by myofascial release techniques with horses has created an enormous demand for therapists with these skills. With this in mind, I have designed a myofascial release equine therapy seminar with my son Mark F. Barnes, MPT, and his wife Shannon M. Barnes.

Mark has a degree in exercise physiology and a master's degree in physical therapy and practices in Boulder, CO. Shannon and Mark have extensive experience in training and treating high-performance horses. They have recently purchased a 35-acre ranch high in the Rocky Mountains to establish a myofascial equine treatment and training center.

Therapists who have learned these techniques have gone on to develop new lucrative careers by broadening their therapeutic effectiveness.

For information on Equine Myofascial Release Seminars, call (800) 473-0657.

No References

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