

Equine manual therapy – case studies

Summary

Manual medicine is used for diagnosis and treatment of reversible musculoskeletal system disorders via the hands of a physiotherapist. The objective of the study was to determine the influence of manual therapy on the welfare and motor capabilities of horses. The study focused on the effects of three methods: massage, chiropractic and stretching. The study investigated the influence of massage on post-laminitis difficulty in walking (Case 1) and on acceptance of touch in the case of a horse unaccustomed to human contact (Case 2), and the effects of the use of massage and stretching in a horse with no motor dysfunction that displayed unwanted behaviour, such as crib biting (Case 3). In each case, the massage resulted in a decrease in heart rate (6.7%) and number of breaths (14.9%), and an increase in the manual evaluation score (7%) and the frequency of behaviour typical of relaxation, such as chewing (on average 54.5%) and lowering of the head. The frequency of changes in position decreased, and in the first and third case, the frequency of yawning increased. In the horse with gait difficulties, longer steps, greater overall freedom of movement, and the loss of the incorrect 'camped out' posture were observed. In the third case, increased involvement of the hind limbs during movement was achieved. The study confirmed the positive effect of manual therapy on the locomotor system and welfare of horses.

KEY WORDS: manual medicine, horses, locomotor system therapy, welfare