

Is Your Pet Well Adjusted?

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Veterinary care has come a long way in the last twenty years. Many people are recognizing their animal companions as capable of suffering physical and emotional pain similar to humans. Indeed, our furry friends' anatomy and physiology are similar to ours in many ways. No wonder they are "man's best friend".

Chiropractic care is now an option for pets, and it offers animals the same benefits as humans. After practicing conventional veterinary medicine for seven years, I sensed a need for healing beyond medicine and surgery. Having experienced the benefits of chiropractic care myself, I knew its potential, and I became certified in veterinary spinal manipulative therapy (VSMT). I completed an intense post-graduate, veterinary specific training course in order to get certified. Over the last five years, I have seen truly amazing results with my patients. My inspiration to learn and provide this care for my patients was born of personal experience, and my excitement continues to grow as I see my patients respond in remarkable ways!

Think of the brain like a telephone receiver, and the spinal cord, which is housed by the bony spinal column, like the phone cord. The brain sends messages to the rest of the body via the spinal cord. This is how the brain "talks to" the rest of the body, maintaining coordination and proper functioning. Misalignments, or subluxations, in the spinal column interfere with the messages getting out to the rest of the body. I often refer to it like "static" in the phone line. The end result is disease, and an inability of the body to maintain optimum health.

Proper nerve function is the basis for health. In chiropractic, we have a saying: "Bones are dumb, they do what muscles tell them to do. Muscles are dumb, they do what nerves tell them to do." The central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) is the control center for the entire body. Nerves branch off the spinal cord to reach end organs and muscles, so the brain can tell the body what to do. The spinal cord is surrounded by the vertebral spine. Misalignments in the spine will disrupt the flow of information, leading to disease. A properly adjusted spine keeps the body in optimal health, tapping into the body's innate healing abilities and prevents disease.

Spinal manipulation locates subluxations, or misalignments in the spine and other joints. Though the misalignments may measure only in millimeters, the health ramifications can be profound. Due to disruptions in the surrounding soft tissue, such as muscles and nerves, misalignments can lead to disease and dysfunction in the body. An adjustment is a directed thrust to move a joint past the physiologic range of motion without exceeding the anatomic limit. Adjustments restore alignment and flexibility, release muscle spasms, and allow nerves to function properly. A thorough understanding of anatomy and specialized training in spinal manipulative techniques are necessary to safely provide this therapy.

Veterinary spinal manipulative therapy may be indicated for an array of health concerns, including arthritis and joint stiffness, chronic ear infections, neck pain, allergies, lameness, gastrointestinal and internal organ disease, incontinence, injury prevention, and overall health maintenance. For horses, gait/bit issues, lameness, resisting leads, decreased flexibility, or behavior changes may benefit from chiropractic care. Many of my patients are canine and equine athletes who receive regular chiropractic care in order to maintain top form.

Some examples of my patients' responses to spinal manipulation include: a dog who couldn't jump into the car for two years, readily jumped in after one session; a horse who was bucking when going into the canter stopped after his pelvic misalignment was resolved; a fecal incontinent dog who went from soiling in the house everyday to only twice a week; and a horse who was head shy improved dramatically after her atlas was adjusted.

Initially, a few sessions one to two weeks apart may be needed, then generally every 4-6 weeks is recommended for maintenance. Of course, individual responses and recommendations vary, and are patient specific.

Note: Spinal manipulative therapy does not replace general veterinary care and should not be used in cases of fracture or cancer. The author strongly recommends seeking a veterinarian certified in spinal manipulative therapy to provide treatment for your pet.