

# - Horse Massage - Not Just for Mr. Ed Anymore

by David Alan Morrison

Portland, ME

[www.davidalanmorrison.com](http://www.davidalanmorrison.com)

*Horse lovers are a devoted lot - often times sacrificing their own wants for the needs of their horse(s). The lengths these people go to for their horses are beyond comprehension to those who are not in the equine know.'*

*One of the practices in the field of horse health care is "Equine Massage." I have noticed quite a bit of apprehension about it, despite the fact that this practice is an ancient art.*

After a long day of strenuous activity, most people head for the tube of Ben Gay, a heating pad or bag of ice. Others prefer a long soak in a tub filled with warm water, laced with relaxing lavender oils. There's nothing like the sensation of pampering tired, aching muscles with a little TLC. Want more than that? Try relaxing on a padded table, listening to soft music as someone else works out the kinks in those joints with a deep tissue massage.

Do you think massages are a luxury, too pricey to justify? Think about it this way: According to medical professionals, a deep tissue massage carries health benefits both for the nervous and skeletal systems of the body.

And if it's good for you, imagine what it can do for your horse.

Whether in the show ring or riding the trails, your horse works hard for you. Sure, a jumper works in a different fashion than a show horse, but as we all learned in grade school, *the ankle bone's connected to the leg bone, the leg bone's connected to the...* well, you get the idea. Through its daily activity, the muscular formation can take quite a beating, taking its toll on the horse's conformation, not to mention the mental stress that goes along with the duties the two of you are working toward. Being a responsible owner, you want the best for your steed.

Crystle Martin, a self-proclaimed 'horse-poor equine enthusiast,' puts it this way, "Because the muscular structure of horses is similar to humans, I think it's pretty obvious that they would get sore, tired muscles, too." In addition to relief from muscle fatigue, other benefits for the horse include: easing of muscle spasms, improved attitude, diminished symptoms of colic, and better balance. History suggests cultures as old as the Greeks and Egyptians understood this fact and, in the case of the Greeks, would massage their steeds prior to battle.

But equine massage holds benefits for the human as well as the horse. "I feel like I'm being a good mom, taking care of him in the best way possible. It gives us quality time together; it gives us a level of intimacy beyond regular grooming," Martin explains.

But for Martin, the idea of equine massage goes beyond merely hiring someone to do the work. She is one of a host of people who are seeking out education so that they can do the work themselves. Just as anyone can learn the proper way to groom his hard-working friend, **anyone** can learn to massage the horse's over-worked muscles. Schools that teach this technique abound and even the most



cursory Internet search will bring up a host of places where you can learn this ancient art.

So how can an eager massage-therapist-to-be know which schools are to be trusted and which are merely out to grab your money? Conversely, how can the responsible horse owner differentiate between a valid practitioner and a quack?

Enter the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage, or the NCBTMB. This Illinois-based organization remains accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). In addition, all practitioners obtaining certification through the NCBTMB are also required to adhere to a Code of Ethics ([www.ncbtmb.com/standards\\_of\\_practice.html](http://www.ncbtmb.com/standards_of_practice.html)).

Another Equine organization at your disposal is Equissage, Inc. Also approved by the NCBTMB, Equissage, Inc. boasts affiliation with the International Association of Animal Massage Therapists. The IAAMT, a Virginia-based organization founded in 1989, states that their members, (numbering over 1,000) operate under guidelines which include a strict code of ethical conduct ([www.iaamt.com](http://www.iaamt.com)). For a referral to a certified member of IAAMT, consult their website, or contact them at 1-800-843-0224.

For Martin, the choice to pursue the education was a no-brainer. "I love my boys! I want them to have the best possible care they can get, while being happy and gaining a competitive edge." When asked if she has thought about pursuing the certification so she can massage other people's horses as well as her own, she thinks for a moment.

"Well," she says with a mischievous twinkle in her eye, "right now, I'm being a little selfish. It's just for us."

She sighs heavily and adds, "Of course, I wish they could give *me* a massage, too!"

David Alan Morrison hails from Portland, Maine. He is a playwright who has been successful in the production of three stage plays. He was enrolled in the Iowa Writer's Workshop this summer.