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Equine Cranio Sacral Therapy (ECST)

Most horses have injuries or an illness at some point in their lives. Most recover without any lasting problems, but sometimes even though the vet is happy with their recovery, a lingering restriction remains. Maybe he can no longer jump cleanly over a parallel off a long stride, or in the medium trot one diagonal is longer than the other, or his lateral work in one rein has lost fluency. Perhaps he is picking up a few time faults cross country, or becomes crooked and short striding downhill, or there has been intermittent unidentified lameness. Does any of this sound familiar? If so, then Equine Cranio Sacral Therapy may be able to help.

What is ECST and where has it come from?

Equine Cranio Sacral Therapy is a holistic healing practice which comprises of light specific finger pressures, with no bone manipulation. These pressures are used to release held tensions and restrictions enabling the horse's body to work through its full range of movement without pain or discomfort.

Cranio Sacral Therapy was originally developed in humans, when an osteopath, Dr. William Sutherland, noticed a discreet but distinct cranial rhythm which could be felt in many areas of the body. This rhythm changed in areas of the body that were not functioning

correctly and he also found that by using a simple but powerful hands-on technique he could alter and improve not only the rhythm but also the function of the body in that area. The rhythm can be felt by trained and experienced practitioners. The work was further developed by Dr. John Upledger. Cranio Sacral treatment was then adapted and developed for use for equine and canine care by the internationally renowned American, Maureen Rogers, who is a pioneer in the field of Equine Cranio Sacral Therapy. She has, in turn, passed on her knowledge and passion to her students, now qualified therapists both here in the UK and worldwide.



How can Equine Cranio Sacral Therapy (ECST) help my horse?

Due to the many everyday stresses horses are subjected to, most horses could benefit from ECST work to keep their bodies both healthy and in balance. These stresses can be caused in a number of different ways including: field or ridden accidents, recovery from illness, dental work, bridles and saddles that are not correctly fitted, incorrect training.

ECST is a subtle and gentle therapy which can be highly effective in dealing with numerous conditions that include: headshaking, lameness, blocked tear ducts, sinus problems, cribbing, behavioural problems, facial nerve paralysis, temporomandibular (TMJ) dysfunction, head, spinal and hind end injuries to name just a few. The treatment concentrates its work directly onto the central nervous system which in turn controls the muscular and skeletal systems. The work, whilst being very gentle and non-invasive, works deeply in the horse's body and the results of ECST treatments can usually be seen immediately after a treatment in the way the horse holds itself and moves.

How ECST works

The cranio sacral system of the horse comprises of several parts of the horse including the bones of the head or cranium, the spinal column and the sacrum or quarters, as well as the spinal cord. Traditionally the treatment focuses on the head, spine and sacrum, but it is not limited to these parts. The horse's head connects through the spine, spinal cord and dural tube, which is a protective sheath that encases and protects

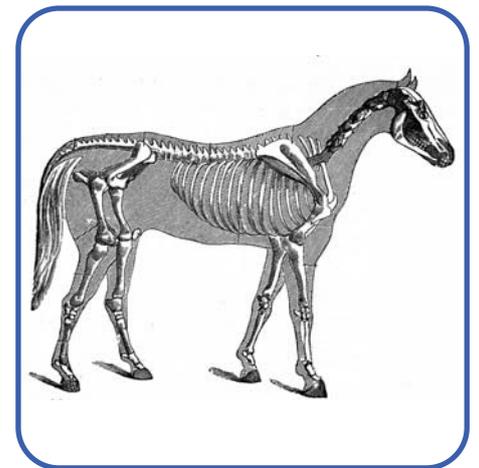
the spinal cord within the spinal column to the quarters. The spinal cord is only attached to the vertebrae at the second vertebrae (axis) from the skull and at the second sacral vertebrae, (the highest point in the hind quarters), between those points it 'floats' within canal in the body of all the vertebrae that make up the spine. Injury and trauma can cause the dura to twist and distortions can occur in the dura tube around the spinal cord linking the two ends, which affects the cranial wave and creates imbalances in the horse's body. If you imagine having an evenly stretched piece of cloth, if you then twist one corner you will see the effect and stress caused to the rest of the material. Therefore, it can be seen that an injury to the hind quarters of a horse can affect the head and vice versa, an injury to the head can affect the hind end over a period in time. Restrictions to the cranio sacral system can be caused by stress, trauma, illness or injury which affects how the horse's body moves and functions, creating imbalances in the muscular skeletal systems. The restrictions in the body will affect behaviour, performance and the horse's attitude over time.

The Equine Cranio Sacral therapist is trained using a light pressure to palpate the cranial wave anywhere on the horse's body with a precise hands-on technique which will release the restrictions within the system. Depending on the various conditions of the horse, the therapist is taught specific points of contact. By palpating the cranial wave on different areas of the horse's body, the therapist can tell

where the skeletal and muscular systems are compromised and imbalances occur. The therapist will interpret this discrete movement to locate these restrictions, and then assist the horse's body in releasing the effects of injury or stored trauma.

The 'technical' bit

The joints or sutures between the cranial bones forming the horse's skull or cranium comprises of a complex and intricate pattern of twenty six individual plates of bone, each varying in shape and size, which are formed together to protect the brain and eyes, houses the teeth, forms the airway and sinuses, allows for movement and to help disperse the impact of a blow when an injury to the head occurs. Cranial bones are alive with a significant amount of blood supply making them pliable, this is important as without their pliability they would shatter with impact. The cranial bones of horses continue to develop from birth to four to five years old, and any stress or trauma to the young horse's skull will have a significant impact on the horse's health and cranial bones throughout its life. In addition the way a horse is castrated, trained, ridden and even the method that dental work is carried out can have a large effect on a horse's general health.



What to expect from a ECST session

A session takes about an hour and a half. Photos and a report of the treatment are emailed to the client and advice for integrating the work is given to help to gain the maximum benefit from the session. The number of sessions needed to treat different conditions will vary from horse to horse depending on the seriousness of the condition.

It should be noted however, that equine cranio sacral therapy cannot replace professional veterinary care but can work as a complimentary treatment, and it is advisable to ensure that the vet is happy for a treatment to take place if the horse is currently under veterinary care.

If you would like any further information on ECST visit www.equinetherapyservices.co.uk