

Supplemental notes to “Bodywork for Animals: Connect, Breathe, Flow” from Here We Grow Again Natural and Holistic Pet Care Series, Season 2 (Megan Ayrault interviewed by Ana Maria Vasquez)

To register for the entire series, go to <http://www.1shoppingcart.com/app/?Cik=5053516>

These notes do not follow exactly the conversation of the webinar, but are supplemental to it.

See links and coupon passwords for special offers at end of these notes.

It all comes down to connection and flow of energy...

Energy can be in form of:

- muscles firing and relaxing
- blood and lymph circulating
- nerves firing, communicating
- energy from forces and movements coming into the body (ground force, pressures, etc.)
- heat
- piezoelectricity (*from Wikipedia: Piezoelectricity is the electric charge that accumulates in certain solid materials (notably crystals, certain ceramics, and biological matter such as bone, DNA and various proteins) in response to applied mechanical stress.*) Note: collagen fibers in fascia have a characteristic of crystal structure, which is molecules set in an ordered pattern without being at freezing temperature. (*Also from Wikipedia: Collagen fibrils are semicrystalline aggregates of collagen molecules. Collagen fibers are bundles of fibrils. Collagen fibrils/aggregates are arranged in different combinations and concentrations in various tissues to provide varying tissue properties.*)
- magnetic energy
- light
- nutrition
- oxygen, breathing
- ??? Chi energy, in Eastern theories/descriptions, also comes in many forms, including from the air, from food, from our parents, etc. All about the flow of energy no matter the source.

Perfect health is when all forms of energy flow where they need to flow without getting stuck, so all parts and systems of the body can communicate with each other efficiently. (Unavoidable negative effects get the attention needed to restore flow and connection.)

1. Look at breathing... Helps us and our animals!

The breath will be helped automatically during process of *positive* bodywork/touch, but can be even more effective with conscious attention.

Benefits to increasing oxygen levels, but also benefits to

- neurological system (stimulate parasympathetic effects/mode)
- internal organs (alternating compressions with the movement of the diaphragm muscle)
- circulatory system (stimulated by movements and eased by dilation of vessels)

- lymphatic structures (immune function)
- bone and joint health (especially the spine, where the ribs are connecting/moving)
- muscle tensions/balance (ribs, diaphragm, and (at least) all muscles connecting onto ribs, including neck, shoulders, abdominal/core, back, and pelvic muscles)
- emotional effects (even hormones, I'm sure, but can't tell you the mechanisms without some reading up on it)

Better/deeper breathing may be a result of improvement in any of these areas, but can also be used to *create* changes for them through breathing exercises/attention.

Possible negative effects on our animals' breathing, ribs, diaphragms, etc.

- Emotional stress, anxiety (whether their own or picked up from us)
- Injuries, traumas, surgeries (changes to connective tissue, scar tissue, adhesions)
- Pain from anything, anywhere in the body
- For horses: riders, saddles, girths
- Confinement or lack of adequate movement/exercise

Recommended book: *Breathing: Expanding Your Power and Energy*, by Michael Sky

Just a few key points from his book

- Breathing is not just moving air, but moving energy
- “For the perfectly healthy,... energy would flow unimpeded from cell to cell and radiate without interference... For the rest of us, the movement of energy is a far more tenuous affair. As we grow, we invariably develop patterns of tense and contracted energy, patterns that impair the free flow and perfect radiance of energy...” (page 33)
- Relates to physical and emotional health
- Affected by trauma, but also by habits/patterns
- Negative influences unavoidable, but can be healed (energy flow improved again)

Some techniques related to breathing

- Gently and slowly, feel for the sensation of “spring” in your animal's ribs. May have dog or cat in your lap and feel both sides at once, or lying on ground/floor and compress (gently) from one side at a time, or can be standing, as with a horse, and do from one side at a time.
- Also, YouTube video for horses: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdrvveoKOGI>
- If using this YouTube video idea for dogs or cats, can still watch and much of the information applies, just modify the technique itself for different bodies.
- “Bodywork” may also be as simple as touching your animal and breathing together! (Also positive effects from just being together and breathing together, without touching.)

Coaching Tips related to breathing

- You can apply these slow compressions as your animal breathes out, and release as they inhale, but it's not critical that you always be in sync with the breath to feel and encourage the movement and pliability of the ribs and the relaxation of the muscles. Main thing is to go slowly and gently enough that they don't need to guard against you “pushing” on them.
- In general, if you are “pushing” (vs. encouraging, coaxing, feeling,...), you'll create a push back from their body. Not what you want. If you feel that, make slower and/or smaller movements,

even if that means being still and passive for awhile.

2. **Connective Tissue (Fascia= fibrous connective tissue)**

Excerpt about fascia found in both of my books, *The Horse Lover's Guide to Massage: What Your Horse Wants You to Know* and *The Dog Lover's Guide to Massage: What Your Dog Wants You to Know* :

Anatomy: The Fascial Web

Fascia, or connective tissue, forms a three-dimensional web of connections throughout the body, changing its form for different jobs as needed by changing the proportions of the molecules that make it up. An analogy, much closer to reality than you might think, would be using flour, sugar, salt, and water (maybe add a few spices?) to make many different foods, depending on the exact recipe. Even bone, for example, is connective tissue with calcium and other minerals added. Layers of connective tissue, including membranes around and within muscles (myofascia), membranes around organs and bones, and the layer of superficial fascia between the skin and underlying tissues, are known collectively as fascia. Tendons and ligaments are actually this very same fascial tissue concentrated into denser forms in order to connect muscle to bone (tendon) and bone to bone (ligament).

It's important to realize that connective tissue is not being used like glue or tape to join separate pieces together, but that the various parts are actually different aspects of one single Whole. One spider web spun from one strand of silk, so to speak. Thus, every cell in the body has a physical link to every other cell in the body. They are not merely floating side by side in the fluid that is between them.

Functions of connective tissue

- Transmits (and absorbs) force
- Separates compartments (organizes and protects)
- Sensory organ (especially superficial fascia, contains mechanoreceptors and pain receptors)
- Can contract
- Communication (as sensory organ and ??)

Here's a link to a video clip of living (and moving!) fascia, a microscopic view:

<http://allaboutequinemassage.com/2010/07/27/microscopic-video-view-of-living-fascia/>

Negative effects on fascia come from inflammation, forces of impact, dehydration, immobility (general or local/specific) and aging (but how much is really necessary from just aging? - not as much as most beings experience). Every structure in the body has a fascial component. Example: nerves have fascial elements as part of their structure, AND are also encased in fascia. Tight fascia can put excess pressure on nerves, inhibit communication and cause pain.

Fascia itself can contract, more so in response to inflammation (fibroblasts change shape and become contractile in presence of inflammation). Research finds contractile fibroblasts (myofibroblasts) in normal fascia, but a higher density of them when inflammation is/has been present. Fascia also has specialized pain receptor cells (nociceptors). Most nociceptor and proprioceptor cells in fascia are in the superficial fascia (just under the skin). Also, research as shown that slow, moderate stretching has an anti-inflammatory effect and decreases pain. Yoga and MFR are both examples of slow, moderate stretching. **(But very important, this slow, moderate stretching can only happen when the body is not guarding against it!)**

Links research and more at the website for the Fascia Research Congress: <http://www.fasciacongress.org/>

3. Another technique to play with...

Passive Touch (Still Touch) over the sacrum

- The sacrum is the top of your animal's rump, actually the base of the spine, between the “low back” and the tail.
- This is a key area of the body, prone to inflammation and fascial restriction.
- Rest your hand on it (can be in line with the sacrum, fingers pointing toward head or tail, or can be across the sacrum, fingers pointing either to left or right side of your animal's hind end). Could be resting weight of your hand, or going for zero weight. Try both and see what you and your animal like best. Both can be good. Your shoulder should stay relaxed, even if you're slightly holding your hand to reduce its weight.
- Plan to spend several minutes or more, though if your animal leaves, don't force insist. (Can encourage, but not force.)
- Keep breathing :-)
- Visualize the fascia (briefly, to start) as thickened, hard, cold taffy, and then visualize that taffy warming, becoming more pliable, more liquid, till it feels like the sacrum is floating, as if in its own water balloon (which it actually is, or should be!).
- Without pressing into the body, visualize your hand/palm growing roots, or shoots of light/energy, connecting down into the sacrum.
- Know that there are acupuncture meridians (channels) running through and alongside the sacrum (Governing Vessel and Bladder Meridian). Think about the flow of chi through the area.

4. Inflammation

Can be local or systemic. Results can be:

- edema (but not always evident)- increased pressure can contribute to pain and reduced ROM
- knots in muscles where fibers getting glued, compressed together
- trigger points, version of a “knot” around a muscle spindle cell
- broad surfaces of neighboring structures get stuck together
- fascia itself can contract, tighten even without adhesions
- not limited to musculoskeletal system, can be in organs, veins, nerves, etc.

Some ways to counter inflammation and its effects (Besides nutritional aspect, which is also very significant. I'm also not talking about herbs/medicines here.)

- Lymphatic techniques (one simple version is in a free webinar for e-mail members)
- Slow, moderate stretching (yoga, MFR)
- Scar tissue work
- Trigger point therapy
- Many massage techniques to decrease, melt, “break up” adhesions (broad or focal)
- Movement (active and passive, increasing circulation, etc.)
- Anything to decrease stress and tension (prevent inflammation being triggered from strains)
- Hydrate! (We need that reminder more than our animals do, in most cases.)

Thank you!

And I'll be making more videos this year (and future) so please stay in touch!
Here are the special offers, and more, available to those who listened to
this Here We Grow Again webinar:

Offer 1

Helping Your Dog's Hips (8 weeks of online lessons on your own schedule)

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Megan Ayrault, LMP, L/SAMP, is a licensed bodyworker for animals and people, and author of books on equine and canine massage (*The Horse Lover's Guide to Massage* and *The Dog Lover's Guide to Massage*). She is also the founder of AllAboutAnimalMassage.com, which offers an array of on-line videos, ebooks and more for all animal lovers. Megan's specialties include Myofascial Release and Shiatsu/acupressure, and generally a focus on working with connective tissue (fascia) in ways that balance both structure and energy flow for greater health and comfort.

Megan taught professional certification classes for large and small animal massage with the Northwest School of Animal Massage from 2005-2010. Currently she teaches on-line classes for animal owners and continuing education for professionals (through AllAboutAnimalMassage.com) with video classes and e-mail coaching. She also tends to her horse, dog and human clients near Seattle, WA, where she lives with her own animal (and human) family.