

## Physiotherapy and Hydrotherapy

### Why use physiotherapy?

After an injury or illness physiotherapy can be used to optimise the conditions for healing, promote mobility and restore function.

Current legislation only permits the use of 'physiotherapy' (including chiropractic and osteopathy) under the direction of a registered veterinary surgeon i.e. by referral. Physiotherapy is a science based profession that is assessment driven and thus requires regular reviews.



### Indications for physiotherapy

Physiotherapy may be useful as part of a multimodal treatment plan for a variety of conditions which may include:

- injuries to muscles, tendons and ligaments
- nerve damage
- back pain
- poor performance
- wounds +/- scar tissue
- prevention of injury (or recurrence)
- splints, sore shins, bursitis
- arthritis
- following surgery.

### Treatments

Your therapist may use a variety of different techniques depending upon the type of injury, the tissues involved and the stage of healing. For example:

- hot and cold therapy;
- manual techniques – massage, myofascial release, trigger point release, joint mobilisations, stretches;
- electrotherapies – laser, therapeutic ultrasound, pulsed electromagnetic fields, shockwave, neuromuscular electrical stimulation, TENS, H wave, microcurrent therapy;
- postural work – use of poles, long lines, use of Pessoa and kinesiotape.

### Organisations

The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy (ACPAT) is an organisation whose members are appropriately qualified, experienced and insured and work closely with members of the veterinary profession. Qualifications and membership can be checked on the database at [www.acpat.org](http://www.acpat.org).

There are also a number of other organisations providing training in equine physiotherapy techniques. In order to avoid using unqualified and uninsured individuals, XLequine recommends that owners always ask their veterinary surgeon for recommendations on suitable therapists.

### KEY POINTS

- Poor or inappropriate techniques may be harmful to your horse, so ensure your veterinary surgeon is involved in coordinating the physiotherapy program.
- Ensure your physiotherapist only works with your veterinary surgeon's consent.
- Check with your vet that your physiotherapist has appropriate qualifications and has adequate professional indemnity and public liability insurance.
- Regular effective communication between owner, veterinary surgeon, physiotherapist and farrier is important for the welfare of every horse.

### Why use Hydrotherapy?

Hydrotherapy has become an established part of rehabilitation programmes for people, horses and dogs.

Pools, water treadmills and spas all utilise the physical properties of water - buoyancy, resistance, hydrostatic pressure, viscosity and surface tension – but these may be manipulated in different ways. Water can reduce the amount of weight borne through the joints, assist with building muscle strength & cardiovascular fitness, as well as reduce swelling by aiding lymphatic and venous drainage.

The horse is not a natural swimmer thus **swimming in a pool**, although non weight bearing, is considered a high intensity exercise. Heart rates may exceed 200 beats per minute, so care must be taken to avoid exhaustion. Thus swimming in a circular or straight pool, while a useful conditioning method, is not suitable for acute injuries or immediately after surgery. Additionally, not all horses swim with an even motion and therefore swimming may reinforce an abnormal gait pattern.

**Water treadmills** tend to use freshwater at ambient temperature. The horse will walk in water usually at around knee or hock height. This is less intense than swimming, but there is still some reduction in concussive forces from the buoyancy and lack of a rider's weight. As the horse has to lift its legs higher against the resistance of the water, it encourages a greater range of motion and a longer stride than on land. It also encourages better recruitment of the lumbar muscles and hindlimb engagement. The world famous Valegro has the underwater treadmill included in his work.

**Spas** use cold salt water (2 - 4°C) which is then aerated. This makes it a useful modality for acute injuries - especially of tendons - as it facilitates healing by decreasing inflammation, improving oxygen delivery to the tissues and reducing pain.



STRETCHES CAN BE USED IN THE TREATMENT AND PREVENTION OF INJURIES



COLD THERAPY BEING USED FOR A TENDON INJURY



XLEquine is a novel and exciting initiative conceived from within the veterinary profession made up of independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout the United Kingdom, members of XLEquine are committed to working together for the benefit of all their clients.  
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