

What if a Simple Massage Could Transform Your Pet's Health?

A soothing and relaxing massage can offer immense benefits for pets, but what if they don't want to be touched? Here are some pointers to help you get started.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pet massage therapy offers multiple benefits including stress reduction, improved circulation, enhanced immunity, better digestion, and strengthened emotional bonds between pets and owners
- Before starting massage therapy, consider your pet's temperament and health conditions, as some pets may be uncomfortable with certain types of touch
- Professional massage sessions can help establish a baseline and teach proper techniques, allowing pets to gradually become more comfortable with therapeutic touch
- The effleurage technique uses long, gliding strokes with light pressure across the body to promote relaxation and increase circulation in pets
- Tapping (tapotement) involves gentle drumming motions with fingertips or palms, alternating between different body areas while monitoring the pet's response to pressure

For humans, getting a massage after a long day is one of the best ways to relax, as it helps ease stress, reduce pain and alleviate muscle tension. But did you know that your beloved furry friends can reap these benefits, too?

Top Benefits of Pet Massages

Massage is a therapeutic technique that requires gentle, sometimes firm, pressure to engage and manipulate the muscles and soft tissues in the body. It relies on the sense of touch to ease physical, emotional and mental strain. The good news is that our feline and canine companions can also experience these benefits.

Pet massage promotes relaxation and reduces stiffness and muscle tension, which may be common in highly active dogs.¹ It also helps improve lymph flow and promotes circulation, reducing inflammation, pain and fatigue.²

Rubi Sullivan, founder of the group Heal Animal Massage and an instructor at the Northwest School of Animal Massage in Washington, shares how a massage can uplift your pet's health.³

"What's great about massage for pets is that there really aren't any downsides to this therapeutic practice. There are just so many benefits to you and your furry family members. It's definitely a win-win.

We see huge benefits for the animals. As animal massage therapists, we benefit from it because it's pretty amazing to watch the animals."⁴

What's more, massaging your pet can also foster a stronger emotional bond between the two of you. It creates a safe space for physical and emotional connection, fostering trust and attachment. Here are other benefits your pet can reap from massage therapy:⁵

- **Improved digestion** — By increasing blood flow, it stimulates the digestive system and helps reduce constipation and gas in pets.
- **Better immunity** — It enhances the immune response by improving circulation and reducing stress hormones.
- **Activation of parasympathetic nervous system** — This induces relaxation and calm, helping your pets get high-quality sleep.
- **Eases musculoskeletal discomfort** — This is particularly beneficial for aging pets as it addresses joint stiffness and muscle tension, improving range of motion.

Reminders Before Doing Massages

Although humans are accustomed to massages, pets may have a different experience. Some pets become skittish or guarded when they are touched in areas that they aren't comfortable with; one wrong stroke and you might cause your pet to hide from you. Sullivan explains:

*"For some pets, it may be their toes. For others, it may be their inner thigh muscles, which aren't normally touched unless they are at the vet. They're not used to that kind of touch, and they didn't call us and say, 'Hey, I want to schedule an appointment.' Building trust and having lots of patience and persistence are necessary."*⁶

So, before engaging in a massage session, you must take into consideration factors like your pet's temperament, health conditions and previous experiences with other vets or animal therapists. It's also a good idea to hire a professional at the start of massage therapy, who can provide regular sessions.

"A regular routine can be beneficial because it establishes a baseline. After the first few sessions, you can get a true reading on the pet. A lot of animals can be a little guarded initially. When families can see animals relax, it has a ripple effect," Sullivan says.

When you or an animal therapist is doing massages on your pet, make sure to closely observe their behavior and body language. See if there are signs of discomfort or pain, so you can adjust the therapy accordingly.

*"Always watch for feedback from your pet. Look for not just feedback in one particular spot, but also in different locations, environments, and stress levels to see how they respond to a stroke in different situations." Sullivan advises.*⁷

Try These Massage Techniques

There are various techniques you can try on your pet, but if you're just starting out, here are two options you can try for both dogs and cats:⁸

- **Effleurage technique** — This simple and soothing massage uses long, gliding strokes with light pressure all over the body. It helps relax muscles, increase circulation and promote overall relaxation:

1. Gently place your hands on your pet's back or neck area.
 2. Using a smooth motion, glide your hands following their body contour.
 3. Continue using long strokes on your pet's body. Adjust pressure and speed as needed.
 4. Observe areas of sensitivity or tension in your pet's body and adjust accordingly.
- **Tapping (Tapotement)** — This is simply drumming your fingers on an area on your pet's body. It's similar to the Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) used in humans:
 1. Gently place your hands on your pet's back or neck.
 2. Use your fingertips or palms to make a light tapping motion, alternating between hands and areas of the body.
 3. Observe if there are any areas of tension or sensitivity; adjust pressure accordingly.
 4. Keep doing this for a few minutes, gradually increasing speed if desired.

Sources and References

^{1,3,4,5,6,7,8} [Vet Tech Colleges, September 26, 2024](#)

² [Catster, October 3, 2024](#)
