



**A Horse Owner's Guide to Equine Massage**  
**PART ONE: Guidelines and Prominent Points of the Horse**  
**Before You Begin!**  
by *Debranne Pattillo, MEBW*

As you carefully lowered yourself from the saddle, your muscles cringed as both feet hit the ground reliving every moment of the month's grueling schedule. Those two shows, the 3 day clinic with the international trainer and all the hours of preparation really took their toll on your body. A massage right now sounds great, but what about your horse? Maybe his fatigued and sore muscles could use a helping hand too.

When your muscles are tight and sensitive you try to avoid repeating the strain by limiting use in the area and taking it easy. Unfortunately, many of our horses do not complain loud enough and they will do the same work day after day. When your horse ends up with a problem, if you think back hard enough you will remember when his performance slowly declined or his behavior changed.

Muscle injuries can sneak up on your horse little by little until you have an actual problem. You can help head these issues off early by using simple massage techniques.

An even larger massage benefit is discovering what is normal for your horse. Most horses will readily accept these strokes if you introduce them to him slowly and wait to increase the amount of pressure when he invites you for more weight by leaning into the move. If he has accepted and welcomed these strokes on a regular basis and then objects, this information should tell you something is not quite right.

#### **GUIDELINES and BASICS**

In each of these features we will show you simple massage moves which you can try at home on your own horse. You'll find that each move can be employed on quite a few areas of your horse. However, before we begin there are a few simple guidelines to follow to keep everyone safe:

**Do not tie or crosstie.** If you hit a sore spot he may pull back. Run the rope through a ring and hold on to the other end or use hardware that allows the rope to come loose slowly.

**Choose a quiet area to work.** If he is comfortable in a stall this is the easiest place for a massage. If he is usually in a pen with other horses, work on him outside the fenced area to keep some distance from his curious friends.

**Watch your time.** Massage these areas for 3 to 10 minutes, 2 to 3 times a week. Serious work such as direct pressure, deep pressure and cross fiber friction (at that deep level) should only be done by trained professionals.

**Pay attention.** If you hit a particularly sensitive area, he may get defensive.

**Never massage with elevated vital signs.** Something is going on with your horse and massage may not be appropriate for him at this time.

**Stay away from injured areas.** Avoid any recent soft tissue injuries.

**Avoid pressing on anything hard.** Many pressure points are close to the bone. If something does not yield to your touch it is probably bone. Massaging over bone can cause bruising and discomfort.

**When stretching is too much.** Avoid any extreme or excessive stretching on horses who are about to be worked hard. Keep it small in these instances and perhaps stretch *after* a rigorous and demanding schedule instead. Only offer full and powerful stretches *before* a work session after the tissue are first warmed up and when the horse is working 30-40% capacity of his conditioned training schedule. Avoid fatigue during the work session if you have stretched prior to the session.

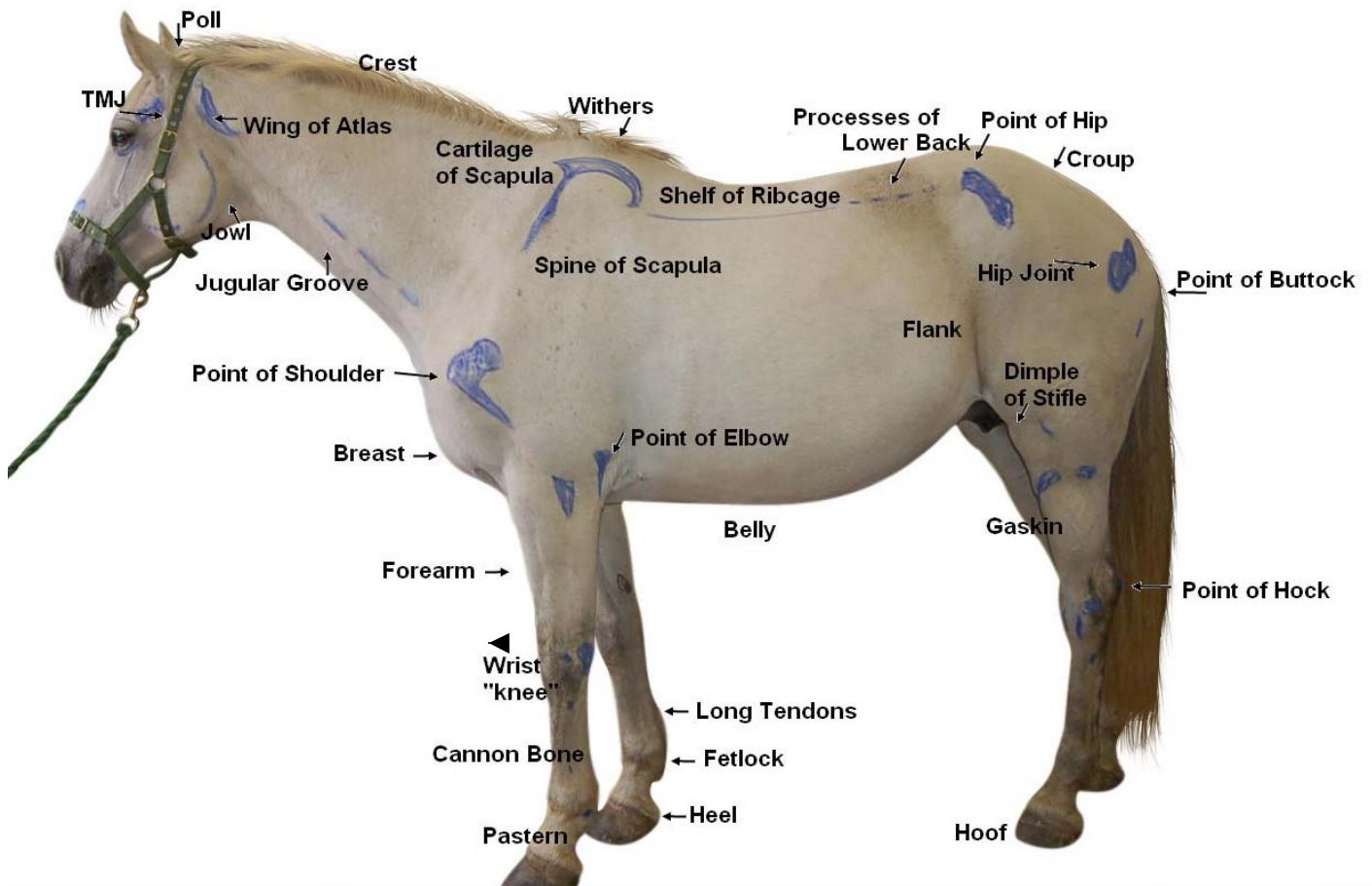
**Finishing up.** A light easy ride without any tension, speed, intricate maneuvers and fatigue is great after you have completed a lot of these massage moves. If you don't plan to ride, walk your horse in hand for 5 to 10 minutes immediately following your session.

**Have questions?** Ask! Anytime you are concerned if massage is appropriate for your horse especially if he has had issues in the past, run it by your vet. If your horse is currently under veterinarian care for any injury or condition it is even more imperative that you check first with your vet.

**EXTERNAL PARTS OF THE HORSE**

Before we get started with this series let make sure we are using the same lingo in regards to external parts of the horse. You can use this to refer back as we continue through the different moves. Terms that are typically understood in the barn aisles are those we will use for the sake of ease.

Any area that is blue represents prominent bone or cartilage that is close to the surface and should be avoided.



**EXTERNAL PARTS OF THE HORSE**

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***About the Author: Debranne Pattillo is the CEO of Equinology INC®, an educational company with sister affiliates around the globe offering over 50 courses taught by leading veterinarians and specialists. Debranne is the chief instructor for the Equine Body Worker Certification Courses (equine massage), Advanced Equine Massage Techniques Level One, the Progressive Equine***

*Anatomy and Equine Stretching courses. She has been featured in various major media publications in the USA, UK, New Zealand and Australia and her work was showcased on BBC's Country Files. More information can be found at: [www.equinology.com](http://www.equinology.com)  
Debranne lives in Gualala, CA and holds a long time practice as a Master Equine Body Worker in the neighboring 5 counties. She spends over 300 days a year on the road tending to horses and teaching.*

