

Equine Muscle Release Therapy - Bowen for horses

The term „Bowen Therapy“ is being heard more frequently in the equestrian world and has been accredited to improving the health and performance of many horses world wide.

Bowen Therapy is a technique developed for humans by an Australian man, the late Thomas Bowen. The Bowen technique continues today and is spread around the world helping to heal many people and more recently to help horses.

When used on horses, the Bowen Technique is officially known as „EMRT“ - Equine Muscle Release Therapy™.

EMRT was developed and formalised by Alison Goward, a horse enthusiast and teacher of Bowen Therapy. Alison's wonderment at the effectiveness of Bowen encouraged her to figure out how to use it on horses and together with Dr. Terry McEvoy BVSc (Hons). they culminated the therapy specifically suited to the horse.

Alison Goward developed and the Equus college of Learning and Research to teach and continue to extend the modality on horses.

The practitioner level training is comprehensive and takes 2 yrs to complete - the college strives continuously to improve its curriculum and there is a strict code of entry to gain acceptance into this course. It is reassuring for clients to be aware of the level of qualification EMRT practitioners have gained.

How does it work ? EMRT is a very gentle, hands on, non-invasive therapy designed to put the horse back into balance. Horses like people are subject to stresses and strains from performing athletic tasks or through knocking themselves around which if unattended results in a breakdown in the body somewhere. It may be physical eg. spasm, swelling, tightness causing inhibited movement, it can also lead to emotional problems eg, change in behaviour/attitude to work.

The treatment itself uses a series of small but precise moves over specific areas on the body, which stimulate tiny nerve endings in soft tissue. These moves creates a profound series of signals/vibrations around the body that over-ride the bodies perception of tension, pressure, pain and the stretch length of muscle tissue. This results in relaxation of tissues to which the stimulus was applied and activates other nerve receptors at multiple tissue levels leading to postural realignment, regulation of body systems, facial release and ultimately stimulates the bodies intrinsic ability to heal itself.

It is often found that where the problem presents itself is not always where the problem is - horses compensate very well for areas of weakness or pain and consequently they may get tight and restricted in another area. EMRT works on the entire body so all is improved and clients discover that their thin horses start gaining weight again, grumpy stressed out horses become calmer/happier, they have a bigger range of movement, improved coat colour and shine, just to name a few.

A body is more able to heal itself when in a relaxed state. Because EMRT is so gentle and in fact influences deep relaxation and relief, the horse's body is well able to accept the treatment rather than tense up and go into defence with something more invasive.

Because Bowen Therapy and EMRT is all about letting the body heal itself, we allow a full treatment to continue to work on the body for 7 days. A follow up treatment is not done before the 7 days unless the horse has re-injured. It is common for the bodies biggest changes to happen within the first 3-4 days and it is during this time that we ask for the horse to have time off from their work to maximise healing. By the 7th day one should notice a marked improvement so long as the owner/trainer has followed post treatment advise.

Usually 2- 3 treatments is all that's needed for most complaints but again this varies greatly on the conditions and individual horse.

What can it help with ?

Unexplained resistance

- „Intermittent or un-resolved lameness (not caused by sore feet)
- „Un-explained deterioration in performance
- „Nervous or uptight behaviour
- „Mares during pregnancy/post delivery/over coming birth trauma
- „Uneven muscle development/wastage
- „Cold or sore back
- „Lymphatic or lactic acid imbalance
- „Digestive problems
- „Arthritic pain
- „To aid in the recovery of injury
- „To maintain suppleness and balance
- „Soreness or stiffness post exercise
- „Kidney problems

Many horse owners/trainers use the therapy purely as routine maintenance for their equine athletes to ensure their muscles are in optimum working condition and to support the theory of prevention is better than cure! Just think of your car - if you service it regularly it is less likely to cost you in repairs because you are keeping it well greased, lubed and fine tuned. It's the same for your horse.

Used during Competition - EMRT can be used like a „band aid“ treatment pre-event or even during an event to keep a horse sound. Band aiding targets problem areas in the horse and is frequently used at endurance races, polo events, at shows and 3DE.

There are probably many readers out there now that have seen and used EMRT practitioners at some of the bigger events. We are the ones in our green and beige uniforms rushing around in the background „band aiding“ horses between classes or at the end of the day tuning their bodies up for the next days demands.

EMRT practitioners do not diagnose and the therapy is not a replacement for veterinary advice. It is used very well in conjunction with veterinary care and there are many vets now in Australia and the U.K supporting the technique and even learning it themselves.