

Hands-on healing

Discover how the gentlest of moves can have a powerful impact on your horse's health and wellbeing, as we take a look at the world of Equine Touch to find out how it works

Words Andrea McHugh

From snakebites to behavioural problems, the hands-on complementary technique Equine Touch claims to have helped them all. But what exactly is it?

Equine Touch doesn't claim to be a therapy, but is described as a non-diagnostic, non-invasive, energy and muscle release discipline. Benefits include creating deep relaxation and the release of tension in horses, improving muscle tone, aiding recovery from injury and muscle atrophy, reducing pain and increasing circulation, which then assists with detoxification and lymphatic drainage.

If you watch an Equine Touch practitioner working on a horse, you'll see them applying the very lightest of touches to the body in order to stimulate the soft tissue surrounding muscles, tendons and ligaments. Practitioners claim a series of unique vibrational moves, carried out over specific acupuncture and trigger points, can help to physically and emotionally rebalance horses, allowing them to tap into their own innate healing processes.

The Equine Touch website (www.theequinetouch.com) contains case studies illustrating how horses with an eclectic range of problems, from snakebites to aggression have all been helped. It's fast gaining popularity in the UK and across the world, with students attending courses to learn how to work on their own animals or to gain qualifications and learn more about the benefits of the very gentle moves.



Equine Touch practitioners watch for the horse's reaction as they work



Babette trained as an ET practitioner after Sunny benefited

'The effects are long-lasting'

Babette Tegldal is a dressage rider from Oxford who became passionate about Equine Touch after it dramatically helped to improve her veteran horse. She has now completed the four levels of Equine Touch training to become a practitioner.

"I was attracted to Equine Touch when my dressage horse Sunny developed a very bad sacroiliac sprain and was on field rest for months," says Babette.

"Sunny had been given injections, as well as shock wave therapy from the vet, but sadly the injury kept recurring. I then heard about Equine Touch from a demo that I attended and I was so impressed that I booked some sessions for Sunny.

"They made a huge difference to him and, importantly, the effects lasted a long time. Previously, when he'd been given physiotherapy, he improved for a while but then within weeks he was back to square one. I found that the positive effects of Equine Touch lasted much longer.

"I was so impressed I decided to do the level one Equine Touch Foundation course myself so that I could monitor Sunny's muscle performance and do maintenance sessions with him when needed. Not only did I find that Equine Touch made a huge difference to Sunny's movement, but when I worked on other case studies, I saw how well other horses reacted. I found it incredibly rewarding.

"Sunny is now 23 and I've had him since he was nine. He's still being



Each Equine Touch session, typically lasts an hour and leaves the horse tension-free

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ridden and schooled at Advanced Medium level dressage. I can safely say that without Equine Touch, he'd have been retired a long time ago.

"The motto for Equine Touch is 'helping horses by educating humans' and it's very easy to learn. The ethos of the technique is to make it very doable for the average horse owner, so instructors always go at the pace of their students.

"I love it because it is so gentle, so even when you're learning, if you don't get it quite right at first you needn't worry you'll do any harm to the horse. Horses also tend to find the Equine Touch session very relaxing. It's lovely to see them drop their heads and start to lick and chew as the tension visibly leaves them."

Increased awareness

"My own experience of Equine Touch has allowed me to develop an awareness of any asymmetry that develops in my horse," says Babette. "From a dressage point of view it's been incredible, because now when I'm riding, I can feel when an area of Sunny's body has become tight, or not as strong.

"Equine Touch has given me awareness, but it's also empowered me to do something that will help him and allows me to bond with him as well. It's funny because Sunny now presents the part of his body to me that he feels he needs me to work on!

"The Level One course was a three-day course where I learned basic Equine Touch moves, which are initially practised on humans. Equine Touch is based around basic body balance and is a technique that invites change rather than forces it to happen.

"The body balancing moves are repeated in a choreographed routine equally on both sides of the body. They start at the hind-quarters and then move around the withers and the neck and poll. It's amazing, because you think you have a problem in one location and then discover the real problem is actually somewhere else so it becomes necessary to do a bit of detective work!

The origins of Equine Touch explained

Equine Touch was originally founded in Scotland in 1997 by former police officer Jock Ruddock. Jock, who died in 2011, also had a background in human bodywork techniques and hypnotherapy. His wife, Ivana, is a vet from the Czech Republic and is now an international practitioner and teacher of Equine Touch.

Jock's vision was to teach everyone who had horses to be able to do Equine Touch on their own animals. Together with Ivana, he created the Equine Touch

Foundation and trained Equine Touch Instructors to help teach the method in countries all over the world.

Level 1 and 2 Equine Touch courses are three-day classes, which are taught across the UK by fully licensed and endorsed Equine Touch Instructors. The numbers of students in a class is always limited so that everyone who attends receives lots of personal attention to make sure that they understand and progress well with the hands-on techniques.



Equine Touch founder, the late Jock Ruddock

"Equine Touch works on the fascia, which is a structure of connective tissue that surrounds muscles, groups of muscles, blood vessels, and nerves, binding some structures together, while permitting others to slide smoothly over each other. When you're doing Equine Touch you can see this connection - for example if you are working on the area behind the saddle you may see

muscles jumping higher up the back. It's really interesting.

"The sacroiliac region is a huge structure in a horse and if you were relying on strength you would never reach these structures. Equine touch is a very gentle technique, and because it works on the fascia you can really penetrate this structure. It's amazing!"



Equine Touch students face four levels of training

Find out more

Veterinary permission is always sought prior to carrying out an Equine Touch session, which will typically last from between 45 and 60 minutes.

Equine Touch is compatible with other complementary therapies including allopathic medicine, acupuncture, homeopathy, herbs, Bach flower remedies, chiropractic treatment and osteopathy.

To learn more, to find an Equine Touch practitioner, or to find details of an ET Level 1 course in your area visit uk.theequinetouch.com or email ukcentre@theequinetouch.com