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Manual Treatment Techniques

A common misconception about physical therapy is that it mainly focuses on exercise. While therapeutic exercise is a very important part of the rehabilitation process, manual treatment plays a large roll in relieving pain, reducing swelling, improving joint range of motion and promoting muscle flexibility.

Soft Tissue Mobilization (STM)

STM is the use of skilled, methodical manual pressure and movement of tissues within the body. This technique can be applied to skin, muscles, tendons, ligaments and fascia. To name a few benefits, STM decreases pain by increasing endorphins, promotes tissue healing by improving circulation, decreases swelling by pushing out toxins within the tissues, and improves mobility by breaking up myofascial adhesions and scar tissue.

Muscle Stretching

The goal of this technique is to increase muscle extensibility. Lack of muscle extensibility impedes joint range of motion and can cause compensatory postures that lead to issues throughout the rest of the body. Making sure muscles maintain appropriate length will allow for proper body mechanics and promote a comprehensive recovery.

Joint Compressions

This technique consists of bringing the two surfaces of a joint together with gentle pulsing and oscillations. There are multiple benefits of joint compressions, including decreasing pain by modulating pain receptors, decreasing joint swelling by stimulating movement of synovial fluid, and improving awareness of the joint by stimulating proprioceptive fibers. Joint compressions also simulate the weight bearing process that a painful joint is lacking since the patient tends to off-weight a painful joint when walking and being active.

Passive Range of Motion (PROM)

PROM is a technique where the joint is passively brought through the available range of motion. The goal of this technique is to work towards normal range of motion of the joint in order to reduce compensation and promote full function of the joint. PROM is usually

performed following a manual treatment or modality that works on reducing swelling and/or improving muscle extensibility.

Joint Mobilizations

This technique involves passively moving one joint surface in relation to the other joint surface. Mobilizations can increase range of motion, reduce pain, reduce muscle spasms and promote synovial fluid movement within the joint. The type of mobilization the therapist chooses to use depends on the status of the joint, including how painful and swollen the joint feels, how limited the joint is compared to its normal range of motion, which region of the joint capsule is limited, and what stage the joint is in within the healing process.

While seemingly straightforward, these treatment techniques are complex and are best performed by a licensed physical therapist with advanced training in applying these skills to the animal patient. Unfortunately, not every animal rehabilitation clinic has licensed physical therapists. But here at BARC, every patient who receives a physical therapy session is seen by a licensed physical therapist and each physical therapy session includes manual treatment techniques specific to the needs of that individual patient.