

Physiotherapy – hunting dogs

Muscle and skeletal disorders

- what are they?

Conditions involving pain and irritation in the musculature and skeletons of hunting dogs

Tradition – philosophy – physiotherapy – action – treatment – ways of thinking – what can be done – why isn't physiotherapy used more frequently.

Physiotherapy has a relatively long tradition abroad, both when it comes to the training of physiotherapists and further specialisation in animal physiotherapy. There, physiotherapists work together with vets either in shared practices or by vets referring patients to physiotherapists who have their own practices. The law states that a patient must be referred by a vet before you are allowed to treat an animal physiotherapeutically. Physiotherapy follow up, physiotherapy diagnosis (examination – evaluation – determination) and physiotherapy treatment, various methods, choice of method according to diagnosis, disorder and phase of disorder, or condition are very important components with respect to getting well again, from being ill or having a disorder of the muscle skeleton system.

Physiotherapy treatment of English setter Lyngåsens Pippi Langstrømpe, 4.5 years old, from Tretten near Lillehammer. Bred by Åge Svendsen. Visible functional limp, grade 2-3 (graded grade 0-5 depending on the extent of the limp and intensity), pain localised in shoulder, joint pain and palpation pain, here being treated with a laser to reduce the pain and stimulate the normalisation of tissue activity - chemistry. Condition caused by terrain that was too demanding with respect to the dog's physical condition.

Today, physiotherapy is generally little used on animals in Norway within veterinary medicine with respect to treating dogs or injuries, as a pain alleviation treatment method or with respect to rehabilitation after injury or as a preventative measure with respect to relapses and injury prophylaxis. It's possible that there are a few services in some parts of the country but nothing organised as far as I am aware. Until now there has been no tradition of physiotherapy in veterinary medicine in this country.

Physiotherapy in human medicine and physiotherapy in veterinary medicine are not that dissimilar, both when it comes to the philosophical approach to the subject and practical matters to do with procedures and choice of procedure.

After a while, vets will probably begin to see the need for these services provided by various professional groups such as physiotherapists, chiropractors and also acupuncturists-homeopaths.

Future co-operation between vets and these professional groups would serve patients well, especially when it comes to our case in point, hunting dogs. The strength of this would be the quick access to the correct type of treatment depending on the diagnosis and the phase of the disorder or the condition manifesting. We know that in the case of muscle skeleton disorders physiotherapy treatment can prevent, cure and speed up healing faster than if nothing was done.

Muscle skeleton disorders can be acute, sub-acute or chronic, with a broad diagnosis, history of illness or the course of an illness, how it developed over time.

Both people and animals are designed to be active, to move, to use their bodies.

This applies to both people and animals. Hunting dogs have periodically relatively high and intense levels of activity, associated with hunting.

This is not true all year but for brief periods twice a year.

Hunting dogs that get regular training throughout the year will be able to manage the physical strain their bodies will experience much more easily than hunting dogs that do not get regular training throughout the year.

This assumes that the genetic makeup of these dogs is such that they or their breed are meant to have relatively high levels of activity.

One can think of it as a dose-response approach, with limit values for healthy and sick animals, how much would the individual animal and its tissue tolerate on the basis of their natural condition, the hunting dog's inherent physique and anatomy, i.e. physical build, joint structure, hypo or hyper movable joints, musculature strength, musculature's stamina, ligaments, joint cups and tendons. These factors will vary from hunting dog to hunting dog.

Being sensible and ensuring the correct training before going hunting are good preventative measures to prevent frequent injuries to hunting dogs.

Injuries to hunting dogs – muscle skeleton disorders:

General considerations

If we assume that each individual hunting dog has its own physical characteristics when it comes to activity or the subjecting of dogs' bodies to activity, regardless of whether they are completely functionally healthy or whether there is an old injury or point of weakness from before somewhere, the dose-response approach is decisive when it comes to how a dog will react by developing an illness or not.

If the dose of activity the dog is subjected to is too great in relation to what the individual dog's tissue can tolerate it will respond by developing the pathology of an illness.

Long-term, regular training can prevent such things from happening.

Muscle skeleton disorders can be acute, sub-acute or chronic and their course can be acute, sub-acute or chronic. An acute course of illness is often a result of direct trauma, falls down steep slopes, sheer drops, getting stuck, sprains, or too great a load on the tissue over too short a period of time.

Old injuries or tenuous muscle skeleton conditions might be reactivated or blow up again in training or hunting situations.

When the tissue's upper limit has been provoked and one ends up with a hunting dog with a pathological condition of the muscle skeleton system, a diagnosis, the correct diagnosis, must be made. After this one has to choose the action one is going to take, what has to be done to alleviate the disorder and zero it out so that the dog can once again achieve its normal level of functionality.

Most muscle skeleton disorders require a lower level of activity and rest, or calmer activity, combined with various treatment choices.

This means that it is important that the hunting dog's owner agrees with this and understands the time factor vis à vis treatment. Not all conditions and disorders can be alleviated by the next day.

It is also a good idea to combine anti-inflammatory or pain alleviating medicines with physiotherapy to normalise a tissue's characteristics and the chemical changes and pain impulses or pain receptor activity that occurs in injured tissue or one sees in pathological tissue conditions such as muscle skeleton disorders which is a term that covers many different diagnoses and conditions, i.e. disorders of the muscle skeleton system.

Physiotherapy or applied physiotherapy involves choosing the correct form of treatment after making a diagnosis or a functional diagnosis in order to alleviate and zero out the condition to regain functional health, activity, pain reduction, or to end the pain thus allowing the hunting dog to take new trips and start up its training again, as well as of course hunting.

Choice of physiotherapy method based on the aim of the treatment

Different methods will be used depending on the condition one meets, the diagnosis, and the phase of the disorder the condition is in.

I won't discuss specific diagnoses in this article, I will simply briefly mention the different types of treatments or alternatives that exist in relation to treating pathological conditions of the muscle skeleton system, muscle skeleton disorders that have developed.

Pain alleviation methods and inflammation alleviators, followed by tissue stimulation to increase vascularisation in the tissue and stimulate the normalisation of the tissue with respect to tissue structure and tissue chemistry.

Various applicable pain alleviation methods include ice, heat, laser treatment (see photo of English setter Pippi Langstrømpe and English setter Ronja Røverdatter – lasers were used to treat reactive pain in shoulders after long trips in uneven terrain – dose-response = development of pathology – miosis-tendinosis-myalgia). One can use ultra sound, short wave, TENS - Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation, interference, or alternatives such as TENS like acupuncture transcutaneous nerve stimulation, transcutaneous nerve stimulation, massage, vibration or oscillation.

Taping, activity limitation, activity restrictions and other more stringent measures if the diagnosis and condition requires them.

Physiotherapy treatment of English setter Ronja Røverdatter, 6.5 years old, from Førde. Breeder Dr and Mrs J. Grimeland, Runnen, Førde: dam Susy, sire Rampeskarrets Kompis.

Physiotherapist Åse Birkhaug, specialist general physiotherapy - about me

I run a practice called Equine and Animal Physiotherapy. My name is Åse Birkhaug and I am a physiotherapist and specialist in general physiotherapy. I have my own physiotherapy practice for people and I am a part-time university student studying the science of physiotherapy as my post-graduate subject. My physiotherapy practice for dogs is ambulatory – I get called out when needed.

I have performed physiotherapy on people for 18 years and started physiotherapy for animals in July 2000.

At the beginning I worked directly with vets, but due to time constraints I eventually had to decide to have an ambulatory physiotherapy practice for animals, dogs and horses.

My partnership with the vets lasted from September 2000 until 31st December 2000.

Most of the animals that were referred to me were dogs that were in pain or which had sustained injuries or were post-operative. This meant that most of the work involved pain alleviation or zeroing out pain, rehabilitation, and training at the correct level to regain physical health again.

Many of the dogs were service dogs and rescue dogs so you quickly realised the importance of getting them better quickly and getting them back seeking which is what these dogs are meant to do with their lives.