

# Core strength from the inside out: canine soft tissue injury and repair with massage therapy and Photizo light therapy

*DOGS HAVE around 700 muscles which, along with tendons, ligaments and fascia (soft tissues) support, stabilise and move joints by pulling on the bones of the skeleton. If any of these structures are compromised by injury or tension, however minor, compensation and imbalances will occur within the dog's body. We will look at this in more detail later. This article covers the importance of foundation fitness from the inside out, which includes core stability, correct posture and gait. We will also be looking at soft tissue injury and how therapy and the Photizo red light can help your dogs.*

## Prevention is better than cure – building strength from the inside out

As practicing canine muscle therapists Emma and Roz work with many dogs who are injured or have required surgery and need exercise rehabilitation to get them back to their previous mobility and fitness levels. Experience from more than 15 years in practice has led to a firm belief that dogs are more injury prone than they need to be, and this is irrespective of breed type or conformation.

Many young dogs are over exercised, or exercised in a way that will not benefit them in the long term prevention of injury. This is not about the skeleton, growth plates, bones and joints; although these are all very important, but this is about the deep muscles of the dog whose job it is to provide strength, support and stability to the skeleton and joints during movement and static posture. This deep muscle strength is often described as core stability strength.

Overlaying these deep, short and strong ligaments and supporting muscles are the superficial muscles that move the joints to create motion, which as we know can sometimes be very quick, with sharp twists and turns. These superficial muscles are so called not because they are less important, but because they are closest to the dog's surface, these are the muscles we can feel under our dog's skin.

When the dog's development is primarily about building up the 'movement' (superficial) muscles, sometimes that can be at the expense of building up the deep muscles, and this is what can make some dogs more injury prone than others. They are not 'strong from the inside out'; and therefore running, turning, twisting and jumping can put too much strain on the unsupported joints and the muscle groups that hold them together.

Emma and Roz have studied scientifically proven techniques and advancements in canine exercise rehabilitation and core strength training. With Emma's in-depth knowledge and 20 years' experience in equine rehabilitation and Roz's human and canine core strength training they have together devised a science based clinical programme called PawDimensions which aims to help dog owners and canine sports participants identify their dog's strengths and weaknesses, spot subtle signs of injury before they become chronic and build their dog's foundation strength. Creating that strength from the inside out which is so important for your dog's physical wellbeing and longevity. Emma and Roz teach one day workshops to help owners achieve the best outcome for their dogs.

### Maintenance measures – muscle therapies

Canine massage and skeletal therapists are out there to help keep your dogs in great physical condition – strong, flexible and comfortable. Many dog owners and trainers understand the importance of having regular therapy sessions for their canine



Roz Davies massaging Redford.

athletes to maintain their physical condition.

In the human sphere, musculoskeletal therapists such as physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors, sports rehab and sports massage therapists are routinely used. Professional sportsmen like footballers, runners, golfers etc will have their own team of therapists who travel with them. Many of us who are not so sporty may have pulled our backs while gardening or simply lifting a heavy box. No doubt there has been a time when your muscles and soft tissues needed maintenance and support and relief from minor injury, or overuse.

In the equine world no professional jumping, racing or dressage riders leave their yards without their horse's physical therapy team. Most stables and livery yards have local physical therapists they can call upon, McTimoney, craniosacral, osteopaths and massage therapists.

In the canine world racing Greyhound kennels have their 'muscle men', working alongside their vets. Guide Dogs for the Blind have volunteer canine physical therapists and sporting dog handlers are increasingly using canine muscle therapists to keep their dogs in tip-top muscular condition.

If the inevitable happens – which it often does!

The dog world is beginning to become more familiar with the concept of canine muscle therapy, to treat injury, to maintain muscles and fitness, to support the working, the elderly and canine athletes.

Dogs can and do sustain injuries, slipping on laminate floors, tumbles and injuries while squirrel and ball chasing, muscle and



Emma and Redford show the passive stretching technique.

tendon strains and ligaments sprains are unfortunately common place for our very busy dogs. These injuries that can start off small and unnoticed can lead to sudden and very noticeable problems leading to what we may see as:

- Lameness,
- Gait irregularities,
- Measuring jumps,
- Missing weaves or contacts
- Stiffness,
- Postural changes (back hunched or dipped),
- Depression, grumpy or even aggressive behaviors
- Not weight bearing evenly on all four paws
- Paws unusually starting to turn in or out when your dog is standing or sitting
- Unable to jump up or down from the sofa
- Twitching down the back and dipping away from your touch (indication of spasm). Lacking enthusiasm and zest for life

If any of the above rings a bell with you and your dog, then a massage therapist may be able to help you. We will always work alongside your vet to address these issues in order to comply with the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966.

### What can canine massage achieve?

It is important to choose the right massage therapist; some schools only teach the Swedish massage, however, some canine masseuses will also be trained in more therapeutic and advanced clinical techniques including sports massage, deep tissue release and advanced myofascial release techniques depending on which K9 massage centre they trained with. Palpation is the real key to finding the muscular issues and the training given by the K9 Massage Therapy Centre ([www.k9massage.co.uk](http://www.k9massage.co.uk)) focuses heavily on anatomy and physiology and the location and treatment of injury over the two-year accredited course. Massage Guild members are trained to find and treat spasm, trigger points, myofascial pain, and muscular strains and address compensation issues. The results can be absolutely astounding – check out the website for great case studies.

### Photizo

As part of a range of physical therapies, remedial exercise and mobility techniques Roz and Emma also use the Photizo Vetcare light therapy unit with amazing results and many clients have now purchased their own units to use at home or whilst competing. Photizo is particularly good when a dog or horse is in pain and some of the physical treatments which could be used are only appropriate to humans who can give feedback on discomfort and pain levels.

Infrared light is one of the safest therapies on the market today. When infrared light is administered, it reduces sensitivity of neural pathways and causes the body to release endorphins that provide a nontoxic, natural form of pain relief. Infrared technology is so gentle that it can be used frequently to reduce muscle spasm and increase the rate of tissue healing. There is a growing body of research available at Photizo which shows that people with back problems, nerve damage, muscular diseases, tennis elbow, burns and other ailments have all shown marked signs of improvement using infrared light therapy. And dogs really do benefit from this non-invasive therapy method which can be used at home by their owners. To learn more and to see the most recent research and testimonials go to [www.danetrehealthproducts.com/Photizo\\_Tesimonials\\_Results.php](http://www.danetrehealthproducts.com/Photizo_Tesimonials_Results.php)

If you have any questions or need some advice on your dog's muscular health then please contact Roz or Emma either through the website or Emma on 07977 314138 and Roz on 07958 656119.



## Meet the authors Emma Overend and Roz Davies

Emma Overend and Roz Davies are highly qualified muscle and skeletal therapists working in the canine, human and equine therapy fields and between them are members of: the Institute of Registered Veterinary Animal Physiotherapists ([www.irvap.org.uk](http://www.irvap.org.uk)), the Canine Massage Guild ([www.k9-massageguild.co.uk](http://www.k9-massageguild.co.uk)), McTimoney Animal Association ([www.mctimoney-animal.org.uk](http://www.mctimoney-animal.org.uk) and [www.thesma.org](http://www.thesma.org)), The Canine Touch (UK and Ireland) ([www.thecaninetouch.com](http://www.thecaninetouch.com)). Their clients range from elite dog athletes such as team members from this year's GB agility team and the silver

medal husky racing team, and many show champs including Crufts winners. They also treat many working dogs from the field, which benefit from pre and post season maintenance, working dogs such as Canine Partners and PAT Dogs and those amazing dogs who serve in the military. Of course many dogs Emma and Roz see are our beloved pet dogs that have sudden lameness or ongoing orthopaedic conditions and very importantly older dogs, where owners worry that their dog is becoming stiff and unable to enjoy their normal pursuits.