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Massage Therapy Helps Remove Disease from Your Pet's Body

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By **Dr. Becker**

Today, I'm delighted to be interviewing Jonathan Rudinger as a part of my ongoing Highlighting the Healer series. Jonathan is a registered nurse and licensed massage therapist. He has been instrumental in the development of the field of canine massage, and is recognized as an authority on the subject. Jonathan has appeared on several major radio, television and cable networks, and is the founder and president of the [International Association of Animal Massage and Bodywork/Association of Canine Water Therapy](#).

Like Many Healers, Jonathan's Love of Animals Began in Childhood

I asked Jonathan, who has a very diversified and interesting background, how he branched out from his work as an RN into the field of massage therapy. He explained that his desire to take care of animals dates back to his childhood, but in college his interests were more directed toward the arts. His first degree was in fine arts from Ohio State University, and after graduation he went on to own art galleries in Chicago for about 15 years.

During that time, he started riding horses, and one day, one of his horses was injured. In dealing with the injury, Jonathan began working with a veterinarian at the stable where he kept his horse, and it dawned on him that he could use his hands to help animals heal. That was back in 1982, and he has pursued his passion for helping animals heal ever since.

When he worked with his horse, he saw tremendous improvement in the way the animal behaved, moved, and healed. Eventually, other horse owners at the same stable began asking him to work with their animals. His reputation continued to spread, and ultimately he was traveling to 10 different stables in the Chicagoland area to work with people's horses.

Eventually, Jonathan's brother married a woman who happened to be a massage therapist. She gave Jonathan a massage, and he was amazed at what she was able to accomplish just using her hands. Even though he had been working with horses, he hadn't yet realized just how powerfully healing massage could be. That revelation led him back to school for massage, and also for nursing. He combined the techniques and principles of massage with those of nursing and Western medicine.

While in nursing school, Jonathan learned about healing touch, which is kind of a type of reiki, and incorporated that as well. So he was working with energy, Western medicine concepts, and also massage therapy, and he began combining treatment modalities in his work with horses. Then on July 11, 1997 (he remembers the exact day), Jonathan was doing an equine massage demonstration for NBC-TV. Within a couple of minutes of being massaged, the horse fell asleep.

The NBC interviewer then looked around and said, "There's a dog. Jonathan works on dogs, too. They get stiff backs." "Let's see what he can do." Jonathan figured, "Okay, I can do this," so he reached over and pulled the big Golden Retriever's head into his hands. The dog's eyes rolled back and suddenly, Jonathan felt the fascia (connective tissue) and energy flowing within the dog's body.

At that moment, Jonathan received an epiphany. He suddenly realized he could take all that he had learned – healing touch, reiki, Western medicine, massage therapy, his background with horses – and apply it to dogs. On that day, his life changed, and since then, Jonathan has written several books, produced DVDs, and become the spokesman for the animal massage profession.

How Jonathan's School, the PetMassage™ Training and Research Institute Came to Be

I asked Jonathan to tell us about his school, the PetMassage™ Training and Research Institute and how it evolved. He answered that after the NBC interview, he asked the people involved if they could meet with him the following week to shoot a short video. He told them there were some things he needed to teach people. They agreed, and helped Jonathan create a video that was similar to a half-hour TV show. He took the VHS tape (a predecessor of today's DVD), had copies made, bought cases and inserts for the tapes, and put them all together. He started going to dog shows with his tapes, and within six months he was invited to the Westminster Dog Show for the first time. So he began working with the dogs at Westminster, and he continued to attend other shows and promote his services and video.

Eventually, Jonathan realized he needed to do a second video for older dogs. After that video was completed, someone suggested that he write a book to go with it. Jonathan had never written a book before, and in fact, he says he didn't even like to read! So he found a mentor who sat down with him and instructed him to "just make an outline and fill in the spaces." From that sprung his first book, which he said was quite short and in huge font type, with lots of pictures!

That book is out of print now, but since then Jonathan has written eight more, and he's currently working on a book for dog guardians who want to work with their pets at home. Another book, the Art and Essence of Canine Massage, gives a general overview of the subject and Jonathan uses it as a textbook in his workshops, which are attended by people from all over the world – from 10 different countries and every state in the U.S.

Jonathan has also written a children's book called Dogs Kids PetMassage that has just been endorsed by the Girl Scouts of America as a way for girls to earn a skills merit patch. He wrote a book titled Transitions, which is about delivering end-of-life care to pets using massage techniques and mudra, or hand positions, to enhance the flow of energy. Jonathan says he and his team have found it to be very helpful for owners of dying pets. It helps them begin the grieving process and reach a level of peace with what is happening to their beloved companion.

Jonathan also authored a marketing book to help people create an animal massage business of their own, as well as a book titled Energy Work with Dogs, which is more advanced and addresses the use of chakras, pendulums, energy and the meridians. As Jonathan points out, since all dogs are made up of energy, if we can get the energy flowing and bring a state of balance to the body, health is optimized. He and his team work with many holistic and conventional veterinarians, because his healing techniques integrate well with both approaches.

Jonathan's Massage Students Are About 95 Percent Female, and Many Are in Search of Meaningful Second Careers

I asked Jonathan about the types of people who attend his workshops. Are they pet owners looking to help their own dogs, people interested in a second career in animal massage, or is it a blend? He responded that it's a blend. Most of his students are female and many are looking for second careers. They look back over their work lives so far and realize they've spent 20 or 30 years doing something they don't really love, or in some cases, they've been downsized. Now they're looking to do something in a second career that perhaps made them happy as children, which is often spending time with and taking care of dogs, cats, birds, rats, guinea pigs, or some other pet or animal.

Jonathan and his team offer a workshop – a type of vocational training that can fast-track those students into their new chosen career. They immerse themselves in an entire week of hands-on training with Jonathan, and then follow up with several distance-learning courses to round out their education. After they complete their foundational training, they can get started developing their new career.

Only about five percent of Jonathan's students are male. He teaches kids right out of high school, recent college graduates, people in their 30s, lots of folks in their 50s and 60s, and even a delightful lady from Las Vegas in her 80s who took a WaterWork class on how to do massage therapy in warm water. She has a small heated pool in a solarium in her home and she works with small dogs for extra income. It keeps her active and she just loves it!

Many People Don't Realize the Tremendous Potential of Massage to Enhance Health. It's So Much More Than a Way to Reduce Stress and Muscle Tension

I personally know the benefits of massage, and I not only offer it to my patients, I also get massages regularly myself because of the tremendous health benefits they provide. Those benefits are far-reaching, which is something many people don't realize. Everyone knows massage is relaxing and helps reduce stress, tension, and tight muscles. But there are other huge health implications, including lymphatic drainage, improvements in range of motion – all kinds of things. I asked Jonathan to give a brief overview of some of the benefits he has seen in his years as a massage therapist.

He answered that when he is asked about the benefits of massage for dogs, he talks about increasing circulation – blood circulation and lymphatic circulation – which provides tremendous support to the immune system. It's also useful for weight loss because it can help energize dogs and get them moving.

Massage is also wonderful for oxygen exchange. Lots of the animals Jonathan works with are indoor pets. And of course all dogs live close to the ground. So these pets are breathing all the toxins in the environment that filter down to the ground level, including house dust, pesticides – all kinds of debris. Massage can encourage these animals to breathe more deeply. And a massage therapist can also encourage coughing with percussive moves that loosen phlegm and debris in the lungs, which makes room for more fresh air.

Jonathan says massage also helps dogs feel more confident. For example, with sporting dogs, massage is great for conditioning. It helps prepare them mentally, physically, and energetically for competition. Some of these dogs get massages all winter, then when they start competing in the spring – for example, in luring or flyball -- they're able to run circles around the competition because they're already in shape. Jonathan adds that swimming is also a wonderful addition to a massage routine.

I asked Jonathan about the benefits of massage for pain management in dogs. He replied that if, for example, he has a dog that comes in with arthritis, he works to increase the natural fluids within the dog's body. He works to improve lymph and blood circulation, and hormone and energy flow through all the meridians in the body. This can have huge benefits for an animal's overall well-being.

Jonathan says that when he's working with one of his patients, he puts his hands over the dog's body looking for areas of stagnation, and works to get energy flowing again. He uses his knowledge of chakras and their relationship to the limbic and neurologic systems. It's all about working with energy flow, and that's also what he teaches his students through his workshops, books and videos. He says, "Every aspect of my life is all about increasing energy flow."

Energy is also why he became an artist and owned art galleries – he wanted to enhance people's lives through the use of color energy. These days, he's enhancing the lives of dogs and their humans by improving the flow of energy in dogs' bodies.

Massage Can Also Address Canine Behavior Issues

Another benefit of massage that many people don't realize is that it can calm nervous energy. There are physiologic energy blocks, for example, masses, tumors, reduced range of motion, or muscle tension. And there are also emotional energy blocks in the form of tension or stress. I think that especially in the case of cats, they often suffer from emotional tension, frustration, anxiety, fear or anger rather than, for example, a raging case of arthritis. I asked Jonathan to talk about some of the emotional benefits of animal massage.

He first explained that he hasn't worked with a lot of cats, because only cats are experts on cats, and they haven't shared their power with him... yet! He went on to explain that his approach with dogs is to look at the stomach meridian, which flows down around the mouth, and down both sides of the midline of the body, and

underneath on the ventral side of the body. It ends up around the anus, beneath the animal's tail. The stomach meridian is associated with the emotional brain or the limbic system. If Jonathan is treating an animal that is very fearful or raging, has diarrhea, cramping, constipation or some other disturbance of the GI tract, he'll work along the stomach meridian.

In his experience treating dogs who are fear-biters, food- or dog-aggressive, or who have separation anxiety, he first works with the stomach meridian around the mouth, the belly and the tail, and then takes the dog for a walk. He wants the dog to get a sense of his leadership style and he also invites the dog into a space of safety. As the dog walks with him in safety, he can walk near other dogs or bowls of food, and the dog will cower less and hide less. With time, these dogs pick up on Jonathan's energy as a healer, and they become more confident in themselves, which in turn can correct a number of undesirable behaviors.

Jonathan's Advice for People Who Are Interested in Learning Animal Massage

I asked Jonathan how people can learn more about the techniques he uses and teaches in his workshops, books and videos. He replied that he and his instructors start every workshop with a four-hour dog handling session, and there's a DVD that goes with the training. If someone wants to purchase the DVD and self-study at home, that's fine. He also has a home-study test that follows up the DVD. If someone feels they would benefit from testing, they can use that test. And of course they can also attend a hands-on workshop.

Jonathan and his team teach animal handling skills, because they realized that some people attending their workshops were learning massage techniques, but the dogs were still leading them around by the nose. They needed to learn leadership skills – the concept of being in charge, but gently, without force. It's really a whole other skill set, different from learning massage techniques.

Jonathan has programs available for pet parents interested in gaining some basic hands-on massage skills, and programs for people who want to become licensed animal massage practitioners. I asked him if people need to travel to Ohio to take his workshops, or if they can do it all remotely – or is it a combination? He replied that it's a combination. He doesn't think a person can learn massage entirely from a book or DVD. It's a hands-on skill that requires immediate feedback to master. There are a number of things that a canine massage therapist needs to do in the area of body mechanics in order to become successful at energy work and massage. He says his basic textbook and the DVD are a good place to start, but when people follow those up by attending a workshop, the hands-on experience helps them better understand all the concepts in the book and video.

In the workshops, people learn through practice sessions. As Jonathan says, "Whatever they do to their dogs, they do to me first." He gives them a lot of feedback in the form of gentle guidance. He knows that when they leave to become professional massage practitioners themselves, they will be representing his techniques, so he really wants them to learn correctly. And his training also involves safe dog handling skills to mitigate dog aggression. Students are taught to pay attention to their physical responses and to become self-aware. Animals depend on us to be comfortable in our own skin.

Jonathan Discusses Two of His Most Memorable Cases

I wanted to know from Jonathan about one or two special cases he has treated that were life-changing for the animal, because I know in my own practice, I've seen many. Jonathan replied that as recently as last week one of his patients, an old Golden Retriever, limped into his office. The dog's coat was shaggy and rough looking. His tail was down. He was dragging his paws.

The dog's owner told Jonathan he needed some advice. He was trying to decide if it was time to make "that" decision. The old dog had been in for several sessions, and he still seemed listless. Jonathan told the owner that he wanted to work with the dog for a bit before offering any advice. So he went to work, and within about 10 minutes, the Golden's eyes had brightened, her tail was up, and she seemed to experience a sudden jolt of vitality. They lowered the dog from the table to the floor, and she started almost prancing around the room, exploring, sniffing, and just generally showing interest in her surroundings. It was a 180-degree dynamic shift from the dog who had limped in not a half-hour earlier. *That* dog looked like she was at death's door. But *this* dog suddenly had a renewed life force about her. The Golden passed about a week after that final session with Jonathan, but those few extra days gave her family a chance to spend quality time with her, and she was able to participate.

Jonathan explains that what he did with the Golden didn't involve poking, prodding, twisting, or skin rolling. Instead, he held the dog and allowed her to just become conscious of her body and her potential. He breathed with the dog and held her at various acupressure points and meridians. It was a very gentle, quiet, and slow approach. In about 20-minutes total, the dog told Jonathan she was done. Both he and the dog's owner were in tears – it was just a beautiful experience. Often, the benefits of massage and energy work with dogs extend to other family members, as in this case. If the dog experiences a shift in health, it can be a teaching opportunity for the family because they can shift as well. They can learn to become more self-aware.

Another client Jonathan remembers was a young man who was a freshman in high school. He was very concerned about his dog, who was older than he was. Jonathan could tell that when it was the dog's time to go, the young man was going to be devastated. So he committed that he would bring the boy and his dog in regularly, and he would show the boy what he was doing. He said to him, "I want you to feel this. I want you to come and take some of the responsibility for the well-being of your dog."

During one treatment, Jonathan felt a great deal of heat generating from one of the dog's hips. He put his hand on the hip, but he didn't apply pressure, because as he explained, sometimes massage is about receiving rather than giving. So he placed his hand on the spot where the heat was being generated, and he visualized that he was absorbing the heat and channeling it down to his feet, grounding it. Then he brought the young man over and had him put his hand on his dog's hip, but he told him that instead of pushing, he wanted him to pull. The boy didn't understand, but Jonathan was able to teach him how to pull and channel energy. And the kid ended up with a big, goofy grin on his face. That was definitely a life-changing experience for him.

The young man's mother, a physician, was also thrilled because her son was learning that there are things you can do with energy besides pushing. You can "push" and *make* things happen, and you can also "pull" and *allow* things to happen.

Jonathan Pursues His Passion for Helping Animals in a Variety of Creative Ways

I think Jonathan's work is so emotionally enriching and rewarding. It's almost wrong to call it his career – it's more like his life's passion. As he puts it, he and his team are developing "novel ways to become vectors of healthfulness and happiness." They are working with the veterinary community and recently had a conversation with Dr. Marty Becker about ways to make veterinary practices what he calls "anxiety-free or fear-free destinations." Imagine veterinary clinics becoming places animals actually want to visit! That would be pretty amazing. Many of Jonathan's patients are so excited to arrive at his clinic that they try to jump out of the car window in the parking lot! That's what he would like to see at veterinary practices as well.

I totally agree, and it would be great to help especially traditional veterinarians begin to grasp some of the things they can accomplish with just their body energy and their hands that can make pets feel substantially more relaxed in stressful situations like vet visits. These are simple, small changes that can, over time, create and enhance the bond between DVMs and their patients. Jonathan is helping to facilitate some of these changes with pet parents and in both the veterinary and human massage professions.

As Jonathan went on to explain, he has actually gone beyond that with the Girl Scout program, an after-school program, and a camp program. He and his team want to teach children, as he did with the young man discussed earlier, to work energetically with animals, while at the same time teaching them basic safe handling skills. These are things they don't learn in school or even at home in many cases.

For example, most dog-bite prevention programs teach kids to stay away from strange dogs, or "stand like a tree" if a dog approaches. Jonathan would like to add to that knowledge base by also helping children relate to both animals and people in positive ways. As he puts it, "Let's teach them some other skills about embracing another entity." Help them learn to enjoy that presence and work to enhance connectedness.

Jonathan says that he knows of parents who have sat down with their kids to watch his DVDs or read his books, and some of these parents had a bad experience with dogs when they were young. They realize after watching the videos or reading that the dog who bit them in the face years ago was probably just playing as dogs do, and their face looked a lot like a dog's face. So some of the parents reach a good resolution to a childhood trauma. They learn to forgive dogs and also themselves for holding a grudge against all dogs. Some of these folks go on to adopt shelter dogs. So there are just a lot of ways that massage can help – ways that would never occur to most people.

Last year, Jonathan's program was picked up by RAIVE, Registry for Alternative and Integrative Veterinary Education, as a continuing education course for registered veterinary technicians. He and his team are very excited to be able to offer their training to vet techs and vet assistants, and he would like to see it integrated into every vet clinic in the country.

Bottom line – there's tremendous potential for animal massage for anyone who wants to learn how to do it.

Thank you, Jonathan Rudinger!

I want to offer my sincere thanks to Jonathan for joining me today. This has been such an enlightening and inspiring conversation! I so appreciate his sharing so much valuable information and personal stories with us, and I look forward to checking in with him in the future to see what new things he's working on.

If you'd like to learn more about Jonathan and all the wonderful things he has to offer, you can visit his website at PetMassage.com. He's also on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). You can send an email to info@petmassage.com, and you can also call him at 1-800-779-1001. So there are lots of ways to learn about massage, and to contact him for more information. He has created an open environment that he hopes will be helpful to everyone. As he puts it, "We want you to learn how to get massage, help your dogs, help other people's dogs, and help yourself!"

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