

# Introduction to Integrative Physical Medicine



## What is Physical Medicine?

- Physical medicine is the branch of medicine that includes all techniques and technologies that use physical means to treat and prevent disease.
- Examples include manual therapy, therapeutic exercise, mechanical devices, thermal modalities and hydrotherapy.
- Physical medicine helps to prevent and relieve distress in patients with a broad variety of conditions.
- The benefits of physical medicine are achieved by relieving or decreasing pain, decreasing muscle tension, decreasing scar tissue, improving circulation and respiration, improving range of motion and maintaining muscle strength.
- It should be included in every treatment plan when possible.
- There are veterinarians, veterinary technicians and physical therapists that are trained in physical medicine

## Benefits of Integrative Physical Medicine

- Promotes emotional well-being
- Manages or decreases pain
- Decreases the amount of medication needed to maintain comfort
- Allows for faster and better recoveries from invasive interventions.
- Assists in weight management for pets that have become less active
- Reclaims activities of daily living
- Carries a low risk of adverse effects
- Prevents side effects of inactivity
- Physical medicine also improves emotional quality of life for most pets.
- Physical medicine helps to prevent weakness, muscle atrophy (loss), muscle and joint contractures, decubitus ulcers, recumbency and prevents emotional stress.

## Special Considerations for Pets in Hospice and Palliative Care Programs

- The goals for the pet should be discussed and defined.
- Choose the appropriate therapies based on the condition that needs treated.
- Start physical modalities as soon as possible after a diagnosis. A study done by Kathman in 2006 showed that physiotherapy may be the most important tool to maintain mobility and quality of life for dogs with degenerative myelopathy. Dogs receiving therapy remained ambulatory longer.
- Become familiar with all precautions of the prescribed therapies.
- Assess the pet's willingness to accept each specific therapy and choose therapies that are well tolerated.

## Tips to Improve Comfort During Treatment

- Help provide comfort with good pain management. Give pain medications 1 to 2 hours prior to a treatment session.
- Provide non-slip flooring.
- Provide thermal comfort by providing warmth or keeping the pet cool.
- Music may help a pet to relax.
- Pheromones may also help a pet to relax.

## Assistive Devices

- Utilizing assistive devices can have an enormous effect on quality of life by improving mobility and can make caring for debilitated pets less burdensome.
- Slings/harnesses make getting up and walking easier.
- Orthotics/prosthetics support problem joints.
- Carts allow a pet to stay mobile.
- Therapy balls/physiorolls can assist in standing and exercise.
- Footwear protects the feet from injury or abrasion.
- Toe grips give a dog better traction on slippery floors.

## Examples of Manual Therapy

- Massage
- Range-of-motion
- Stretching
- Chiropractic\*
- Joint mobilization\*
- Acupuncture\*

## Examples of Therapeutic Exercise

- Balance Training
- Proprioceptive exercise
- Strengthening
- Aquatic therapy \*

## Examples of Therapeutic Modalities

- Thermal
- Therapy laser \*
- Ultrasound\*
- Electrotherapy-TENS/NMES\*
- Extracorporeal shockwave\*
- Pulsed electromagnetic therapy\*
- Pulsed signal therapy\*
- Regenerative stem cell\*
- Regenerative platelet rich plasma\*

*\*Therapy needs to be administered by a trained professional*

## Key Points

- Health and mobility changes result in decreased activities and disrupt the normal routine.
- Physical medicine helps to prevent and relieve distress in pets with a broad variety of conditions.
- It should be included in every treatment plan when possible.
- Physical medicine and rehabilitation techniques provide a new activity that caregivers can share with their pets and at the same time improve quality of life.