

INTRODUCING THE MASTERSON METHOD[®]

BEYOND DOG MASSAGE

A
BREAKTHROUGH
METHOD
for Relieving Soreness
and Achieving
Connection



Masterson Method[®] Founder
JIM MASTERSON
with Robin Robinett, DVM

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PART ONE

The Masterson Method



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CHAPTER 1

What Is the Masterson Method®?

The Masterson Method is an interactive method of animal bodywork that follows and uses the animal's responses to your touch to find and release tension in areas of his body that affect movement, comfort, and longevity.

It was developed for the purpose of releasing tension and improving movement in the performance horse. The Masterson Method proved to be effective because with it, the horse participates in the process. It's a method in which you work *with* the horse, not *on* the horse. An interesting benefit that comes with using this method is that it leads to improved communication and trust, and a better relationship with the horse. Another interesting feature is that it works with other animals. And it's teachable.

As with horse owners, horse trainers, and horse therapists, dog owners, dog trainers, and dog therapists can learn techniques that will improve movement, comfort, and longevity and open new levels of communication and enhance their relationship with their animals.

The Techniques used in the Masterson Method all rely on reading and following the subtle changes in the dog's body language as you work with him. Once you learn to read his body language, you and he are on the same page. Communication is established. When you use this body language to help the dog release his tension, trust is developed and a relationship is formed. The dog recognizes that you understand what his body language is saying and there is no threat to his well-being.

The Masterson Method is very practical, easy to use, and results-oriented. You see the results in the dog's responses during the bodywork, and in behavior, comfort, and movement afterward.

What Causes Tension in the Dog's Body?

Dogs develop tension in the body from many sources:

- Work, and overwork or overexertion.
- Play, and overplay or overexertion (fig. 1.1).
- Compensation for other issues such as joint, ligament, systemic, or intestinal issues.
- Past accidents, incidents, or injuries.
- Fear or trust issues.
- Age.



1.1 Play, and overplay or overexertion, can cause tension in the dog's body.

How Do Dogs Deal with Physical Tension or Discomfort in the Body?

Whether prey or predator on the survival scale, the physically stronger and less vulnerable animal has a better chance of survival than the physically weaker or more compromised. As with most animals, dogs are naturally programmed to ignore, block out, and cover up any physical signs of weakness or discomfort in order not to be placed at the *lower* end of the “fitness” scale—that is, at the *top* of the menu! Their nervous system is programmed, to whatever degree they're able, to “cover it up and get on with it”—the *sympathetic nervous system* for people who like bigger words. (See next page for the *parasympathetic nervous system*.)

How Does the Masterson Method Help the Dog Release This Tension?

By working with the dog's natural instincts and the dog's body language, you can help the dog's body to release tension.

The dog communicates through subtle and not-so-subtle changes in behavior and body language. When you learn to recognize changes in behavior and body language that correlate to where the dog is holding pain or tension, you can help him to release it.

When you use levels of pressure that don't trigger the dog's natural tendency to cover up physical signs of weakness or discomfort, and follow subtle changes in the dog's behavior and body language

as you do this, you allow the dog to communicate where he is holding tension, and you allow that part of the dog's nervous system that relaxes and releases tension to let go of it—the *parasympathetic nervous system*.

In a sense, you are bringing and keeping the dog's awareness to that area until the part of the dog's nervous system that blocks out pain and tension (the *sympathetic* nervous system) starts to subside, and the part that relaxes and regenerates (the *parasympathetic* nervous system) begins to release the tension.

Creating Trust Through Communication

One of the major benefits to using the Masterson Method with your dog is the bond of trust that develops once your dog understands you're listening to him on his own level, which dogs don't often experience with humans. Most of us miss what our dogs are experiencing in their interactions with us because we're missing the subtle physical level of body language that they use to communicate.

It's one thing to "get" what your dog is telling you, but when you soften or change what you're doing in direct response to what he's telling you, the dog "gets that you get what he's saying," and the level of trust that develops becomes exponential.

What Types of Dogs Benefit from the Masterson Method?

- All dogs with physical tension and discomfort.
- Working dogs that need to increase range of motion, and improve speed and mobility.
- Dogs that are resistant to any type of pressure.
- Dogs with behavioral issues that stem from physical discomfort, pain, abuse, or poor training.
- Any dog that needs help to connect and build trust with humans.

The Masterson Method can be learned by anyone with a hand or finger, an eye or two, a willingness to slow down and observe the dog—and the ability to be patient!

Three Different Categories of Techniques

There are three different categories of techniques used in this book. I outline them briefly here, then describe each category in detail, beginning on page 7.

1 Search, Response, Stay, Release

The first category is called *Search, Response, Stay, Release (SRSR)*. These are techniques that use little or no pressure to find and release tension at specific points on the dog's body (fig. 1.2).

- **Search** very lightly (using no pressure) with your fingertips over specific areas of the dog's body.
- Watch for a **Response**—a subtle change in the dog's behavior—as you search (see p. 8).
- **Stay**—keep the dog's attention on that spot by resting your fingers there lightly (again, no pressure) until the dog shows you a sign that he has let go of tension.
- **Release**—this is that sign, a larger *Response* or change in behavior, that you are looking for (see p. 11).

Although *Search, Response, Stay, Release* can be used to find and release tension anywhere in the body, in each chapter you'll be directed to use *SRSR* on specific points or areas that commonly hold tension in the part of the body being discussed.

2 Movement Techniques

In the second category are techniques we call *Movement Techniques*—relaxed range-of-motion techniques (see p. 13). These Techniques ask for gentle movement in different areas of the dog's body while these areas are in a state of total relaxation (fig. 1.3). When you move a muscle, joint, or junction of the body through a range of motion in a state of relaxation—meaning the muscles are totally relaxed during the movement—the muscles and connective tissue involved in the movement release tension. The key to using the *Movement Techniques* is to feel the moment when the dog's muscles begin to brace or tense, then to relax your



1.2 Terrier showing a release of tension in the TMJ using a *Search, Response, Stay, Release* Technique.



1.3 Moving the forelimb through a range of motion while in a relaxed state using a *Movement* Technique.



1.4 Releasing tension in the pelvis using a *Hold, Wait, and Melt Technique*.

hands and “yield” to the bracing when it happens, thus allowing the muscles to release the tension (see p. 15).

By feeling your way through the movement, you find *where* the dog is holding tension, and by softening and yielding, you help the body *release* the tension. By watching for *Responses* as you do this, you get added, visual confirmation of *where* and *when* tension has been released.

3 Hold, Wait, and Melt (HWM)

In the third category are what we call *Hold, Wait, and Melt (HWM) Techniques* (fig. 1.4). These are used to release tension in the connective tissues of larger structures or junctions, such as the pelvic junction and scapula-trunk junction. They are similar to *SRSR* in that they bring the body’s awareness to tension, except they are focused on larger structures and junctions.

Communication Through Touch and Response

- All Masterson Method Techniques rely on the use of very gentle and soft hands.
- All Masterson Method Techniques use levels of pressure or touch that stay under the dog’s bracing response.
- All Masterson Method Techniques rely on reading and following the dog’s *Responses* to your Touch. This allows the body to communicate *where* it’s holding tension, and *when* it’s released it.

Now I'll talk about the *Levels of Touch* we use, and the *Responses* we look for.

Levels of Touch

As mentioned earlier, the levels of touch or pressure used in all these Techniques are soft and gentle. The reason for this is that the dog's body can block out or brace against even the slightest amount of pres-

sure, especially when there is discomfort or tension underneath it. Here are the different levels:

- **Air Gap**—The first level of touch we call *Air Gap*, which is absolutely no pressure and little or no contact (fig. 1.5). This level can range from *barely* touching the skin, to *barely* touching the hair, to holding the hand or fingertips a few inches *away* from the skin or hair. In most cases, your hand or fingers won't even be touching the skin. *Air Gap* is



Scan to view
Levels of Touch
video



1.5 *Air Gap* pressure (no pressure).



Scan to view
Types of
Responses video

the level of pressure used in *Search, Response, Stay, Release* Techniques.

■ **Egg Yolk**—The second level is called *Egg Yolk* (fig. 1.6). This is about the amount of pressure needed to barely indent or move the yolk of a raw egg on a plate. It can also equate to the amount of pressure it would take to indent a fresh marshmallow sitting on a plate (*not* one of those hard, stale ones that has been sitting in the cupboard for months!).

We use these Levels of Touch, or *non-pressure* as I like to refer to them, to:

- 1 Search the dog's body to find where it is holding tension.
- 2 Help the dog's body release the tension.

Responses

Search Responses

A *Response* is a shift in behavior. It is any subtle shift in behavior (and this is the key) *that correlates with what you are doing with your hands.*

Search Responses are what you will look for during the SRSR process as we *Search* (see p. 11).



1.6 *Egg Yolk* pressure.



1.7 In this case, as my fingers go over an area where this dog is holding tension, she blinks.

They are an indication from the dog of underlying tension in that area.

The most common and easiest-to-read *Response* is the *eyelid blink*; however, there are a number of different subtle shifts in behavior that can be *Responses*. The following *Responses* are indications that the dog is holding tension in the part of the body that you are working on:

- Eyelid blink or gentle “squint” (fig. 1.7).
- Ear twitch or movement.
- Movement of the dog’s head—both looking away from you or at you (figs. 1.8 A & B).
- Change in breathing.
- Small fidgeting or looking uncomfortable.

Release Responses

Release Responses are the sign of a *Release* of tension. They are generally larger *Responses*, and include:

- Licking and chewing (fig. 1.9).
- Sighing or letting out breath.
- Yawning (fig. 1.10).
- Sneezing.
- Lying down or “flopping” over (figs. 1.11 A & B).
- A large fidget (fig. 1.12).

Once you’ve learned to use the correct level of touch, how to recognize the dog’s responses, and the correlation between your touch and the dog’s response, following the steps outlined below will get you started on this interactive journey. So, let’s go!



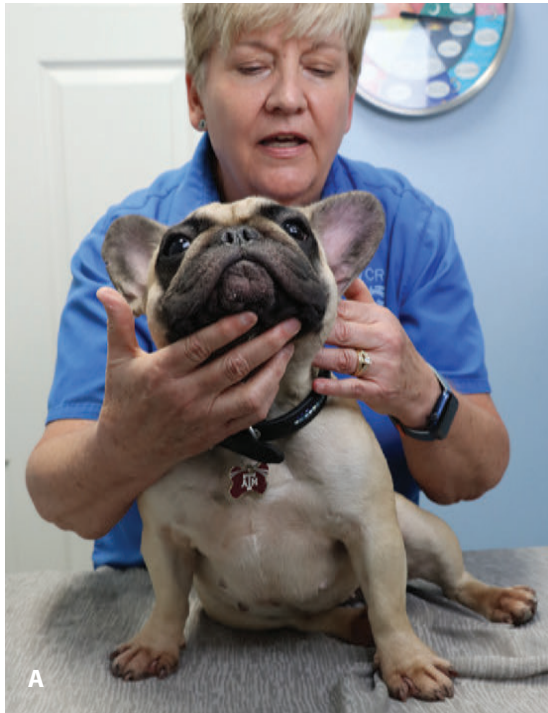
1.8 A & B Here, as my fingers go over an area where the dog is holding tension (A), she turns her head away (B).



1.9 Licking and chewing is a sign of releasing tension.



1.10 Yawning as a sign of releasing tension.



1.11 A & B One minute, she's up (A); next minute, she's down (B).



1.12 A large fidget or change of behavior can indicate a release of tension.

What Is Meant by “Fidget”?

A fidget can be defined as any subtle shift or change in behavior that the dog shows during the process. Some common fidgets:

- Looking away or at you (“dirty looks”).
- Fussing in any way.
- Wanting to move or walk away.
- Reaching around and scratching, stretching, or flexing the body.

Sometimes a fidget will occur during the *Search* part of the process. This is a sign that you’ve brought the dog’s attention to something that he has been blocking out and may be a little uncomfortable. It is physical tension or discomfort that the dog has been naturally dealing with by “covering it up and getting on with it.”

If the fidget comes during the *Stay* (see p. 11) part of the process, it may be part of what’s to come—the *Release*. This will make more sense to you once you’ve started doing this with your dog.

How Search, Response, Stay, Release (SRSR) Works

Search—To *Search*, slowly run two or three fingertips softly over the dog’s body using *Air Gap* (non-pressure). *Air Gap* means touching the hair but not the skin (fig. 1.13).

Response—As you *Search*, you watch for a subtle *Response*. A *Response* is any subtle or not-so-subtle change in behavior that correlates to what you are doing with your hands—your touch (fig. 1.14).



Scan to view
Search, Response,
Stay, Release video



1.13 Search.



1.14 Response.

7

CHAPTER 7

The Midsection

Search, Response, Stay, Release

- Shoulder Points (p. 134)
- Top of Spine and Back Points (p. 134)
- Sublumbar Points (p. 137)
- Flank Points (p. 137)

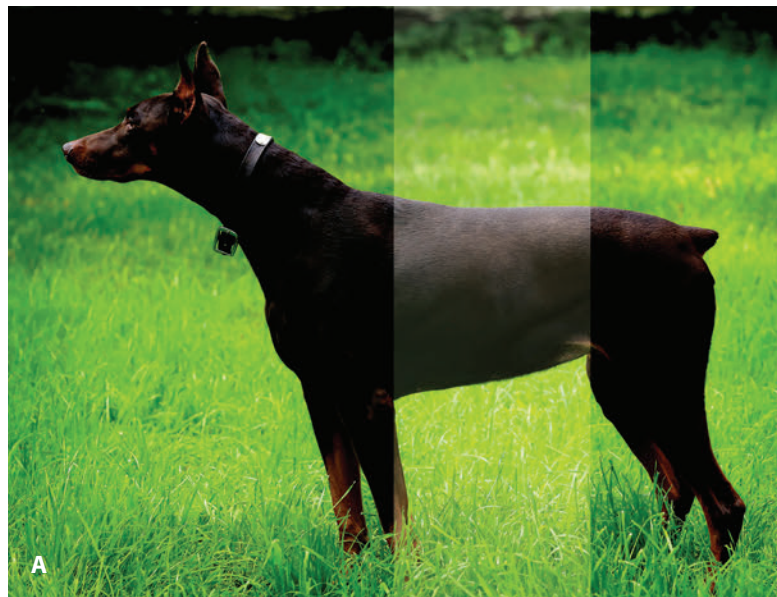
Movement Techniques

- Lateral (Side-to-Side) Body Rocking (p. 142)
- Dorsal-Ventral (Up-and-Down) Body Rocking (p. 144)

Hold, Wait, and Melt Techniques

- Shoulder Release (p. 146)
- Lumbar Release (p. 147)

This chapter discusses the various areas of the dog's midsection that accumulate tension, and offers exercises to release tension in these areas using the three categories of techniques that I outlined in Part One:



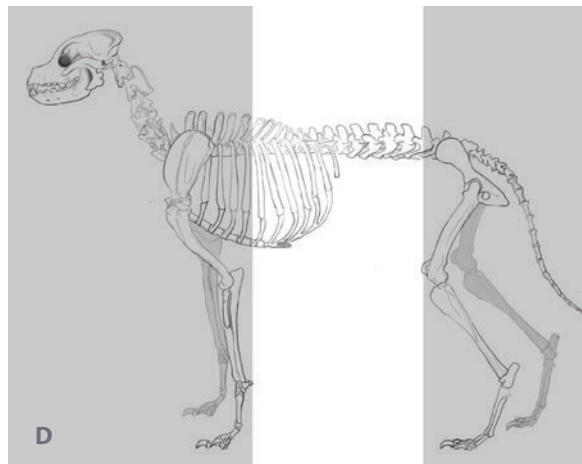
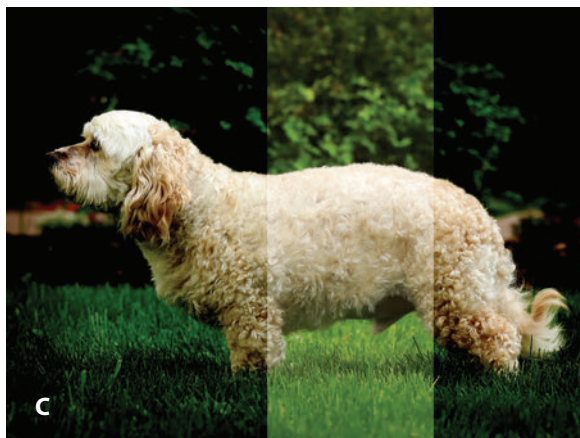
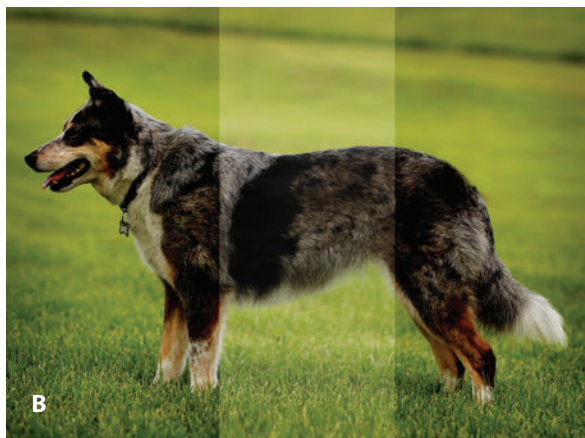
7.1 A–D The midsection.

Search, Response, Stay, Release (SRSR), page 4;
Movement Techniques, page 5; *Hold, Wait, and Melt Techniques (HWM)*, page 6.

Search, Response, Stay, Release

Shoulder Points, Top of Spine and Back Points, Sublumbar Points, Flank Points

GOAL: To apply the process of *Search, Response, Stay, Release* to muscles on the top of the back along each side of the spine, the lumbar area, and the loin area. (To begin these techniques, see p. 134.)



RESULT: *SRSR* on the back releases tension in the muscles and connective tissues of the vertebrae of the spine, the muscles on top of the back, the deeper muscles underneath the spine, and the rib cage. *SRSR* on the flanks and loins releases tension in the muscles of the rib cage and in deeper core muscles in the loin area. This results in improved

suppleness of the spine and rib cage and prepares the spine and ribs for the *Movement Techniques* that follow.

Movement Techniques

Lateral (Side-to-Side) Body Rocking and Dorsal-Ventral (Up-and-Down) Body Rocking

GOAL: To get a relaxed and rhythmic rocking of the entire rib cage and spine. (To begin these techniques, see p. 140.)

RESULT: Body Rocking releases tension in all the muscles of the midsection, the Lumbosacral-Pelvic Junction, and the C7-T1 Junction together, and restores natural movement to the trunk in general.

Note: If you've ever had this done to you, you'll know this is really relaxing!

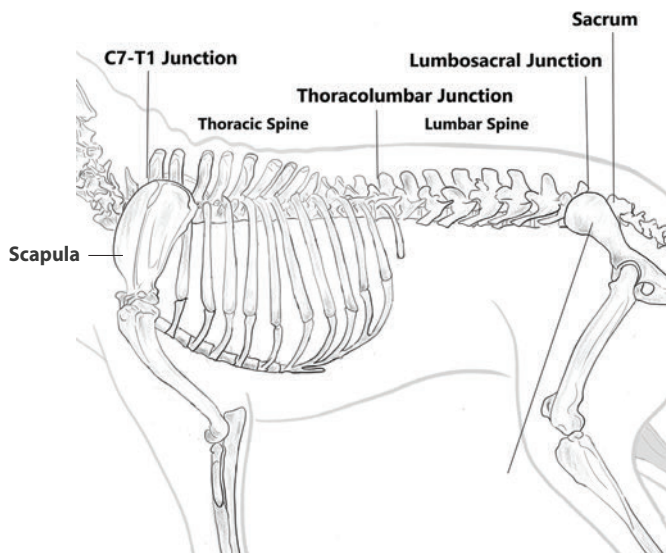
Hold, Wait, and Melt Techniques

Shoulder Release and Lumbar Release

GOAL: To apply the process of *Hold, Wait, and Melt* to the muscles of the shoulders and lumbar spine. (To begin these techniques, see p. 146.)

RESULT: Restores movement and range of motion to the shoulders and lumbar spine.

Note: Some dogs respond better to releasing tension at points on individual muscles associated with a structure or junction, while others respond better to releasing tension on the structure or junction itself. Some dogs respond to both.



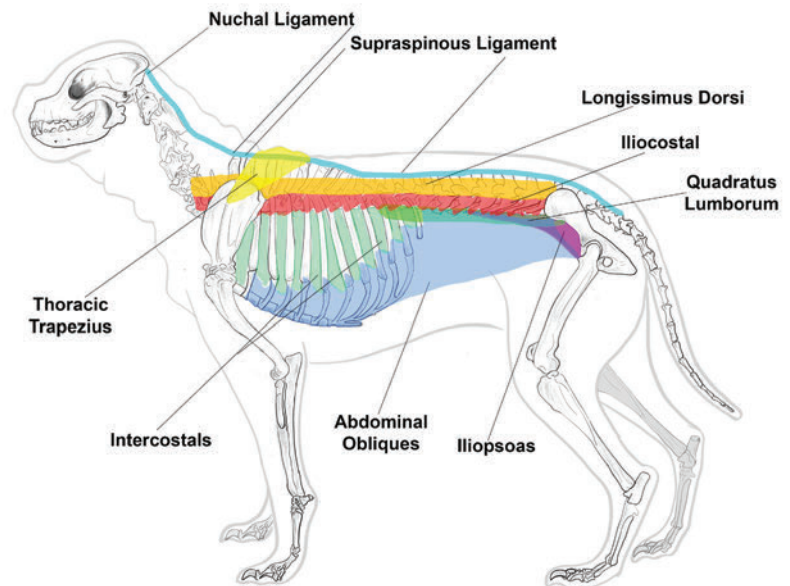
7.2 Midsection spine and junctions.

More Anatomy and the Effects of Releasing Tension

The back and trunk tie the whole dog together. Almost all major muscles converge and attach to the back and midsection. Don't let this scare you, though. The flip side of this coin is that you've already been releasing tension in many of these areas while working on the front and hind ends. This is one reason you put your attention on the midsection last. It's easier to get the trunk moving once you've released both ends.

The Skeleton

The main parts of the spine you're concerned with here are the:



7.3 The muscles of the dog's midsection.

- C7-T1
- Thoracic spine
- Thoracolumbar Junction
- Lumbar spine
- Lumbosacral Junction

The other parts of the skeleton we're concerned with here are the:

- Rib cage
- Scapula-forelimbs
- Hind limbs

Muscles of the Midsection

Muscles on Top of the Spine and Back

If you remember from chapter 5 (see fig. 5.3—p. 71), there is a *cervical* part of the *trapezius* (cervical traps) that attaches at the top of the neck and a *thoracic* part (thoracic traps) that attaches to the top of the trunk between the shoulder blades. They both attach to the scapula on each side (fig. 7.3).

One of the jobs of the *cervical traps* is to pull the top of the scapula forward, which pulls the forelimb back. When the leg is planted, this propels the dog forward. One of the main jobs of the *thoracic traps* is to raise the scapula back, which assists in raising and bringing the forelimb forward. They are also part of the muscular system that supports the trunk between the forelimbs. This is a busy muscle when it comes to support and movement of the dog.

The *longissimus dorsi* muscles run the full

FROM THE VET

Intervertebral Disc Disorder (IVDD)

The *thoracic* part of the spine is relatively stable because of the attachment of ribs and the support of the rib cage.

The *lumbar spine* is more flexible and involved in movement in the hind end.

The *Thoracolumbar Junction (T-L Junction)* is a transition point between the two. Because of the increased mobility of the spine at the T-L Junction, it is the most common area for intervertebral disc problems (IVDD) in dogs. Spondylosis or arthritic changes are commonly seen at the T-L Junction area in older dogs as well, for the same reason.

—Dr. Robinett

length of the back on top of the rib cage on each side of the spine.

One end of these muscles attaches on top of the lower cervical (neck) vertebrae. They run between the two scapulae and attach at the lower back in front of the pelvis on the other end.

When both *long dorsi* muscles contract at the same time, they cause the back to extend or flatten out as the dog extends forward with the forelimbs and extends behind with the hind limbs. When a *long dorsi* muscle on one side only contracts, it flexes that side of the body, causing a bend in the spine and trunk in that direction.

The *iliocostal* muscles run next to and below the *long dorsi* muscles. These muscles attach on top

of the *cervical* (neck) vertebrae on the front end and in front of the *pelvis* at the back end. They have a close relationship with the ribs alongside the trunk, and work individually to assist in lateral (side-to-side) bending.

The *supraspinous* ligament is a band that runs along the top of the spine from the first thoracic vertebra to the top of the sacrum. It attaches to the tops of the thoracic vertebrae along the way. It is a continuation of the *nuchal ligament* (see fig. 7.3—p. 130), which runs from the second cervical vertebra behind the skull to the first thoracic vertebra. This band of heavy-duty ligament stabilizes the spine and helps hold everything together.

The *multifidus* muscles weave in between the vertebrae and support the spine.

FROM THE VET

The Benefit of Core Muscle Exercises

The *multifidus* muscles are major “core” muscles that support the spine. Research in people and animals shows that with a back injury, these muscles start to atrophy or decrease in size and weaken within 72 hours. These muscles have to be activated by doing some type of exercise specifically targeting them to wake them up, strengthen them, and get them working again. This is why core exercises are so important for people and animals, especially after an injury.

—Dr. Robinett

Sublumbar Muscles

These are muscles that attach underneath the spine and stabilize and support the Lumbosacral Junction, flex (arch) the lumbar spine, and bring the hind end and legs underneath the body to drive the dog forward, for example, when the dog runs (see sidebar—facing page).

The *quadratus lumborum* muscles (“QLs” in muscle-speak) attach underneath the thoracic and lumbar vertebra on one end, and on the front of each wing of the pelvis on the other. They support the lumbar spine and Thoracolumbar Junction, and flex the spine and Lumbosacral Junction, bringing the hind end underneath the body during the run.

The *iliopsoas* (also called *psoas*) muscles are the major core as well as “gymnastic” muscles in the dog. In addition to supporting and flexing the lumbar spine, these important muscles also attach to the inside of the femur to bring the hind limbs forward when the dog is running.. Tension or weakness in the *psoas* muscles can be a factor in back pain in both people and animals.

Muscles of the Flank, Abdomen, and Rib Cage

The *abdominal oblique* muscles attach in three important areas:

- The area of the *tuber coxa* or *pelvic point*.
- The *pubic symphysis* in the groin area.
- Throughout the ribs and the fascia of the abdominal area.

The *abdominal obliques* assist in flexing and bending the body. They also compress and support

Muscles Working Together

When the muscles on top of the spine contract, they cause the back to extend or flatten out as the dog brings the forelimbs forward and extends the hindlimbs behind.

Muscles on top of the spine contract to extend the thoracic and lumbar spine, helping Nellie to catch the frisbee (fig. 7.4 A). When the opposing *sublumbar* muscles underneath the spine contract, the opposite happens. The back flexes upward as both the forelimbs and hind limbs come under the body as the dog runs. The *sublumbar* muscles contract to flex the lumbar spine and bring the hind end and legs underneath the body, helping Nellie run away with the frisbee (fig. 7.4 B). The *long dorsi* and *iliocostal* muscles on one side contract to bend the body in that direction (fig. 7.4 C).



A



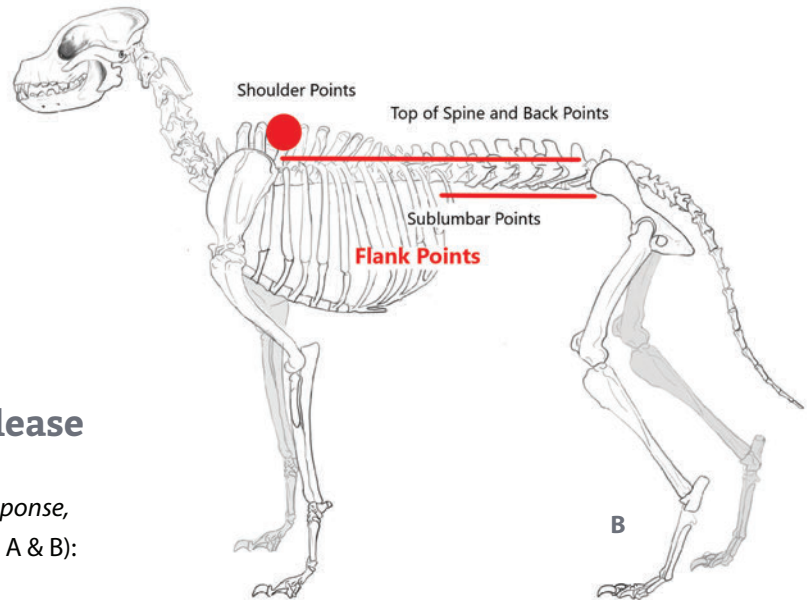
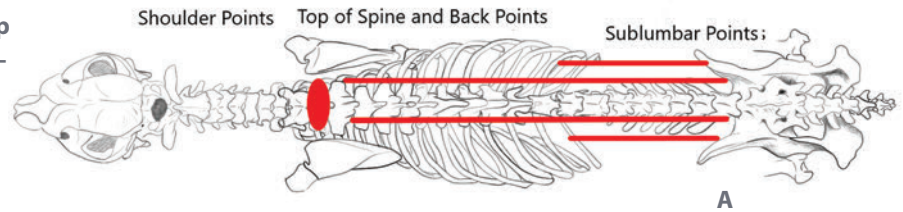
B



C

7.4 A–C The muscles on the top of the spine in action.

7.5 A & B The Shoulder Points, Top of Spine and Back Points, Sublumbar Points, and Flank Points, from the top and side view.



the internal organs of the abdomen during movement.

The *intercostals* are muscles of the thoracic wall or trunk that connect the ribs. Think of them as “rib cage muscles.” In addition to holding things together, one of their jobs is to assist the diaphragm with breathing (respiration).

Search, Response, Stay, Release

GOAL: To apply the process of *Search, Response, Stay, Release* to the following areas (figs. 7.5 A & B):

- Top of the shoulders.
- Top of the spine and back.
- Sublumbar muscles.
- Trunk and flanks.

WHERE YOU WORK

Shoulder Points (Thoracic Traps)

These points lie on top of the back just behind the scapula or shoulders on each side of the spine (fig. 7.6).

Top of Spine and Back Points (Long Dorsi, Iliocostal, Supraspinous Ligament)

These points run on and along each side of the

Muscular Balance in the Body

The muscles on the top of the spine and the sublumbar muscles underneath the spine work together to keep the muscles and joints of the body balanced and healthy. This applies to all groups of muscles that work together.

Balanced conditioning (not overworking one muscle or group of muscles), and bodywork to release accumulated tension also work together to keep the body balanced and healthy.



7.6 The Shoulder Points.



7.7 The Topline and Back Points.

FROM THE VET

Arthritis

The Bladder Meridian runs parallel along either side of the spine. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the acupuncture point *BL 11* is the back association point for bone. Dogs with arthritis or bony problems in general are often sensitive at this point between the scapulae, just behind the C7–T1 Junction.

—Dr. Robinett



Scan to view Top
of the Spine, Back,
and Sublumbar
Points video



7.8 A & B The
Sublumbar
Points on top of
the lumbar area
(A) and on each
side of the lum-
bar area (B).

FROM THE VET

Interconnections

The *abdominal oblique muscles* are also affected by the *Pubic Symphysis Point* on the hind end.

—Dr. Robinett

spine, starting behind the scapula and ending at the front of the pelvis (fig. 7.7). The *long dorsi* points lie parallel and directly next to the spine, while the *iliocostals* lie parallel to them and just a little lower. Your dog will tell you which needs attention.

The Sublumbar Points (Psoas, Quadratus Lumborum)

There are two places to access these sublumbar muscles:

- 1 There are points for sublumbar muscles on top of the lumbar area (fig. 7.8 A).
- 2 There are points for sublumbar muscles along each side of the lumbar area (fig. 7.8 B).

Search both areas, as they are both effective. The dog will tell you which ones are best for him.

To find the front of the lumbar area, feel along the sides of the spine for the last rib of the thoracic part of the spine (see fig. 7.2—p. 130). This is where the lumbar spine begins.



7.9 The area of the Flank Points.

To find the back of the lumbar area, feel for the *pelvic point* that is on what is commonly called the “point of the hip” (hip bone).

Everything in between is the *lumbar area*.

Flank Points (Abdominal Obliques, Intercostals)

These points start at the *Pelvic Point* and can be found anywhere in front of or below the pelvis, throughout the abdomen, rib cage, and trunk (fig. 7.9).

Note that what I have shown you on these pages are the *general areas* of the points. Your dog's responses will tell you exactly which points need attention and where they are.