

We have ways of making you relax

Massage can ease away pain and stress. Deep tissue therapist Chris Toal gives **Anya Kussler's** dog a demo.



MASSAGE THERAPY can be tremendously calming and healing for animals in physical pain and emotional distress. "Human and animal massage is pretty similar," says deep tissue therapist Chris Toal, who works on humans, cats, dogs and has massaged horses, tigers and lions.

"Imagine subconsciously clenching your teeth or sitting hunched over at your desk all day long when you're stressed," he explains. "You're likely to end up with a sore jaw or neck."

Toal says pain occurs because the repeated clenching triggers muscles

to become tense and fires up the adrenal glands, which aggravates the tissue around them.

In animals, feelings of fear and anxiety often kick the muscles and adrenals into action. The cause of this is often an unresolved traumatic experience such as abuse.

When the adrenal glands become over-stimulated, they can cause persistent pain, to which animals react emotionally — with barking, aggression or even physical impairment, like a limp.

By massaging the tissue around the hyper-stimulated adrenals and tense muscles, pain can be relieved

quickly. Better still, regular massage can keep muscles and tissues supple, which helps prevent tension in the first place.

The first major "hot spot", the adrenals, are two large pea-type glands situated just below the diaphragm, if you look at the back of the animal. The second tension area, where animals store their emotions, is the belly region. The lower part of the stomach (towards the hind legs) is where dogs feel guilt, while the "upper abs", just below the ribcage, is the anxiety zone.

Toal says in abused dogs, this area can get rock hard, and he has to work

very gradually and gently to release this area.

Necks are the best area to start massaging an animal. Using gentle fingertip action or a special jade massage tool is a great way to get them used to the therapy.

When he demonstrates this on my own canine, who is prone to ADHD when in new surroundings, she assumes a submissive sitting position with her tail wagging.

Toal has a repertoire of success stories — like the border collie with hip dysplasia. "Within five minutes of massaging she was jumping up and down with a grin on her face."