

Welcome to my newsletter for winter 2021 - 2022!

Habits and routines have featured a lot in my reading recently. This seemed to fit well as a theme for a winter newsletter, because winter is a time of tradition and routine, and attempts at forming better habits if you make a New Year's Resolution! So, here are some thoughts about habit and routine; the good, the bad, and the ugly!

I hope you will find a little bit of fun, and little bit of knowledge here. Do please email me, or phone, if you are curious to find out more about anything you read here.



HABITS AND ROUTINES

"Habit is a good servant, but a poor master!"

I have seen lots of different versions of this quotation; instead of 'habit', money, fire, technology, thinking, the mind. I wonder how many there actually are, and which is the original.

What is the difference between a habit and a routine?

Habits and routines are both actions that we repeat.

A routine usually involves conscious intention.

A habit is often repeated without conscious intention.

How can you make a routine become a habit?

- Arrange a cue to remind you to start your routine.
- Follow through the routine.
- Give yourself a reward when you have completed it.

Sounds very like the strategies we use to train dogs!

DOGS ARE GREAT AT HABITS!

- Developing habits is another way of describing training! So, a dog's ability to form habits is really useful.
- But, habits and routines can lead to dependency, which is not good, because if the routine gets broken it can be very stressful for the dog.
- There is often a trigger that provokes the habitual behaviour – this could be a 'cue' you intend to use – or something unintentional.
- Unwanted behaviours can sometimes be changed by avoiding or removing the trigger or cue.



Why are habits so hard to change?

The recipe in the box above, ie cue, repeat, reward, strengthens neural pathways in the brain that link the 'cue' with the action. The habit is literally becoming hard wired into the brain; it then takes a big conscious effort to override the brain's automatic response to the cue.



Much of our physical movement is also habit.

Our own individual posture and gestures, the way we walk, sit, stand, run, smile are all habits that have been formed over our lifetime. The same is true for our horses and our dogs.



Poor quality movement places extra strain on the joints, tendons, ligaments and muscles.

Good quality movement can contribute towards higher quality of life, for longer.

Make good quality movement a habit from the start!

Whether we are learning a new skill ourselves, or teaching our horse or dog, it is worth taking the time to ensure good quality of movement right from the beginning. Especially, avoid repeating in the hope that it will finally come right! Our brains will form the habit whether the quality of movement is good or poor. So, first be sure the correct building blocks, the strength and coordination, are in place before you start to teach a new skill. Then, go slowly enough to execute the movement correctly. *Then* you can enter the repetition phase and build a *good* habit that can be executed quickly, without mistakes, and without causing unnecessary strain to the body.

What's new for me?

Muscle release therapy will always be the core of my business, but I am always thinking of other aspects of management that pay into musculoskeletal wellbeing.

Last quarter I spent time working with herbs and oils with my own ponies, and really enjoying how they showed me the benefits of allowing them to select their own choice. I also found out a lot more about magnesium supplementation.

This quarter my focus has been on assessment of movement, and on rehabilitation exercises. I am really enjoying working through

- Horse Saddle Rider Applied Kinetic Anatomy, devised and presented by Caroline Lindsey.
- FUNdamentals K9 conditioning course, on Dogs4Motion Academy
- Equine Rehabilitation Bitesized CPD from Animalrehabhealth.academy
- 55 Corrective Exercises For Horses, a book written by Jec Ballou

Next quarter? Well, that will be a new year, so I have not yet decided, but with so many good quality courses now available to study online in my own time I feel spoilt for choice.

Did you know?

45% of all our daily behaviours are automatic (ie habits). Habits are one way the brain has to improve efficiency. On average it takes around 66 days for a new habit to become automatic. Habits are deep rooted in the brain, and can survive even in cases of severe brain damage. Changing a *keystone* habit can have a cascade effect.