



Chiropractic for Animals

Interview with Dr. Foltman, DVM, CVC, CVA
Veterinary Holistic Center; Dunthorpe Farm Veterinary Services

This is a (slightly revised) transcript of the interview by Maribeth Decker, Animal Communicator, Sacred Grove, of Dr. Kelly Foltman about chiropractic care for animals. Watch the interview at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBW47TX2Cik&t=443s>.

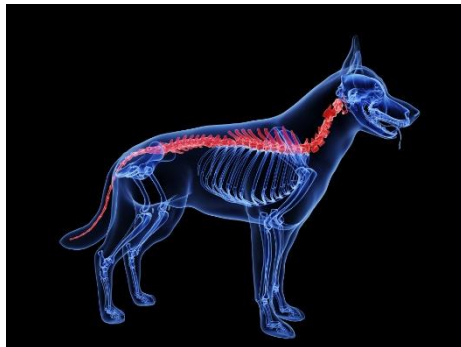
Introduction

Maribeth Decker: Hey, everybody. It's Maribeth Decker with sacredgrove.com. I'm an intuitive animal communicator. I am lucky enough to be here to **Dr. Kelly Foltman**, of **Dunthorpe Farm Veterinary Services**. Dr Foltman specializes in several modalities, but today we're going to focus on her chiropractic care for animals.

I'm fascinated by this area, and happy to learn about this. It's one of the lovely benefits of working at the **Veterinary Holistic Center in Springfield, Virginia**. I learn about new ways to keep our animals healthy and on the planet. That's what we want for ourselves and our animals!

Most of us probably know the word **chiropractic**. A lot of us have had it done for ourselves. But doing it for our animals might be something new.

Chiropractic preserves the neuromuscular system



Dr. Foltman:

Basically, chiropractic focuses on the **preservation of the neuromusculoskeletal system**. You have the **skull, the brain**, which is the **modulator of the central nervous system**. It's the motherboard.

Then, you have the **spinal cord**. The spinal cord **relays all of the messages from the brain to the peripheral nervous system**, and then also gather information **from the peripheral system and send it back up the cord to the brain** so that you can have modulation, and movement, and everything. That's kind of in a nutshell how the central nervous system functions.

The **vertebral column** is 90% of what we work on as chiropractors. The function of the spinal column is to protect that spinal cord. The cord lies between each of the vertebrae.

Why spinal vertebrae and not just one big bone?

If it were just simply for protection and we didn't have to move, this full column could be one big bone with a hollow core in it for the cord to go through. But we really want to be **able to bend, and twist, and move around**, so what we have is a bunch of **individual vertebra** that are held together by ligaments

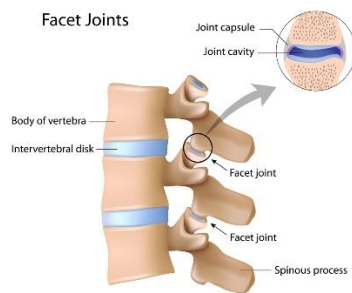


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and by **joints**, and then they can move through stimulation of the nervous system to **allow contraction of various muscles**, paraspinal muscles surrounding this cord.

What parts of the spine do chiropractors work on?



Chiropractors work on the **facet joint**. That's one of the joints that the vertebral column moves around. The other joint is the **disc**.

The spinal cord sits above the disc, and then there is a hole called the **intervertebral foramen**. That's very close to the facet joint.

The **intervertebral foramen** is where you get all of your spinal nerves that have to come off the spine and exit to your muscles and your internal organs. That's how you're going to get innervation to cause contraction of the muscles around your spine, but also contraction of your biceps, your triceps, any other muscle that you have.

What's the idea behind chiropractic work?

The idea behind chiropractic is that **if you have normal motion of your spine, then you will have normal posture and you can have normal movement**.

But if you have pain in any of this as chiropractors, we work mostly off these facet joints. The angle of the facet joint changes based on what function, what type of movement that part of the spine does predominantly. But across species, that angle is the same.

Maribeth Decker: So if you understand a little bit about human spine, then you can understand a little bit about our animals' spines.

Dr. Foltman:

You can. The technique you use differs a lot between a human that is standing on two legs versus a quadruped, and also versus the size of the animal. All dictate how you approach working on that joint, but the joint angle is going to be the same.

What can happen to our vertebral/spinal joints?

You have a lot of nerve endings within the joint capsule that can cause pain. **Whenever you have pain, your muscles tighten up** as a way of trying to protect yourself. That can **create more pain and stiffness**.



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A great example of how the body compensates for pain

If I had **pain in say, my right lower back**, I might then try to **lift my right hip** to release some of the tension on my spasming muscles. If I kept doing that, I'm going to end up **overloading my left side**. I'm going to land heavier on my left leg, which can overload the joints in my left limb.

That's how the body compensates for pain. What can happen down the road is **we can create additional problems in the animal, in the person, if we don't correct spinal problems and spinal pain**.

What's the chiropractor's goal?

We work to **enhance the motion around each of these joints** so that they **move properly, without pain and without restrictions**. That way the rest of the body can move properly into its best function.

Less arthritis

And we can potentially **reduce inflammation** and any **arthritis** of any of these joints, but also of the areas that are allowing your nerves to exit the spinal cord.

Maribeth Decker: Can a **healthier spinal cord may lead to less arthritis** as you grow older?

Dr. Foltman: **Yeah, because you're moving more efficiently. You're moving more correctly. The more correctly you can move, then the less strain you put on the rest of your body.**

Another example: a cast on a leg

Look at somebody that has a cast on their leg. They can move, but they're limping, usually within some period of time, their back is going to start hurting. During the early part of the acute phase, you have a lot of pain. But then, that sort of subsides, and you get accustomed to moving the way you had moved to alleviate some of that pain. You start to think that that's normal, even though it's not normal.

That's where you get more wear and tear on your body. The more that we can make the animal... since I'm only dealing with animals... the more that we can make the animal move correctly, the less wear and tear we have on the joints in the body, the tendons.

Slowing down the aging process

Aging is inevitable. But if we can improve things and slow down some of those aging processes, I do think that can help the longevity comfort level of the animal.



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Dr. Foltman's practice

Maribeth Decker: What kind of animals do you work with? What are your typical patients?

Dr. Foltman:

Competitive and trail horses



My practice is about **70% horses**. A lot of those horses are **competitive horses**, but a lot of horses are **trail horses**. I have some great trail-riding clients that realize that they put their horses through a lot going up and down the hills of Virginia, and whatnot, and rocky areas. **They tend to do better if they are worked on chiropractically.**

For competitive horses, they found out about this very quickly. There are just such **fine lines in competition between winning and losing**. If you are **moving more correctly**, you're **taking less time** to either finish a race or it's **easier for you to complete a task**. If it's **dressage**, it's easier to follow the movements of the rider. In the competitive world, people find out faster.

Small animal competitions; dog agility

The **small animal competitive world was a bit slower** than the equestrian competitive world, but then they were the next group to come aboard. I would say that **agility** people were very... again, it's another sport where it's timed. I will have good clients tell me, "My dog is suddenly... he/she has been great, but having difficulty coming into the weaves or having trouble getting over the A-frame," whatever that is. Sometimes that tells me a little bit about what to expect with that animal.

Injuries

I do more and more **dogs, and cats, and horses that have had injuries**. I do have veterinarians that start to refer to me **post-injury to help with the healing process**.

Geriatric patients

Then I get a lot of **geriatric** animals. That can still help, I just wish that I had started seeing them earlier. Because I think that as we were alluding to earlier, I don't want to wait until we get to that end-stage crisis mode, because I always feel that, yes, I can help them feel better now, but I think **if we had started**



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earlier things could have had a **better outcome**, or this **situation would have been less**, or it would have **come along much later in their life**. I would encourage everybody to **start earlier than later**.

What do we look for to see if our animals will benefit from chiropractic?

Maribeth Decker: What do we notice in our animals to say, "I wonder if chiropractic would help?"

Dr. Foltman: For dogs and cats, **look at your animal as they're moving. They should move in a straight line.**

If they are moving with their front end in one direction and their hind end is **following "one track over,"** be concerned. You'll see the left hind following the right front leg instead of the left front leg. They're **moving in a bit of an arc.** That's not normal. That's not efficient motion.

If you watch them moving from the back, and you're looking at what we call their top line, and **one hip is not moving as evenly...** that's a little bit more difficult to see... but that's another great sign.

From the side, you might see a dog that ends up getting **kyphosis** of the spine. If the **spine might start looking hunched**, that can indicate that we need to work on them chiropractically to relax and get the correct tension back in the paraspinal muscles. Those are all easy things.

The other thing would be a **slight head tilt**. A really obvious head tilt might be something you want your regular vet to clear. I always work with the traditional veterinarian to make sure there's not something more going on. If it's not strictly chiropractic, I always refer them back to their regular veterinarian.

That's how people can start to look at their pets.

Success Stories

Staffordshire Terrier couldn't bend



Dr. Foltman:

I have a **Staffordshire terrier** that I still see in New York. A rehab tech asked me to see him. He's an **agility** and **show** dog. **He just wasn't bending. He couldn't go through the weaves of the agility course.**

They're little fireplugs, and they are very, very musclebound, but they can still bend. He just could not move laterally, left to right you got nothing.



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After just the first session, he was a totally different dog. The next time I went up there, he was just all wiggles. I continue to see him to this day, four years after.

This happens to most of my clients. They start to realize when the dog needs to be seen again. They'll pick up on small issues that the dog might have, especially if they're a competitive dog. Since this dog is also a show ring dog, she notices that he is **better if I can adjust him prior to going into the show ring because he's standing more correctly. He's moving off more correctly.**

To see something that **goes from really almost like a spine that has no joints in it, doesn't want to bend at all, to a dog that can have normal range of motion is a lot of fun.**

Miniature Poodle with a knee injury



Dr. Foltman:

At the Springfield office, I have a wonderful little miniature poodle. He came to me with a **cruciate ligament injury in the stifle [similar to ACL in the human knee]**. He's a small dog and the injury wasn't too severe, so they wanted to avoid surgery.

I started working on him with chiropractic. I also did acupuncture.

That really helped him to get through everything. He went from **basically toe-touching lame to running around.** It would be **hard for anybody to even know which leg that he had had a problem in.**

Those clients come to me about every four to five weeks. We tried to press that out a little too long, but they found out, "Oh, that's not a good idea." He had a little bit of a crisis, and I had to see him weekly just to try to get everything back in. We're back to five to six weeks. **I usually do chiropractic and laser to make sure that we don't have any inflammation recurrence.**

The cruciate is in the stifle, what lay people think of as the knee. It's in the back leg. The ACL is the anterior cruciate. That's where we see a lot of sports injuries in people. It's a big sport injury in dogs, too. Also, different breeds of dogs are more prone to cruciate injuries.

How Dr. Foltman assesses an animal

Maribeth Decker: When we were talking the other day, I loved your philosophy of doing what works, no more, no less. Tell me a little more about that, would you?

Dr. Foltman: I get clients that only want chiropractic or acupuncture. But **if I have my choice, I like to evaluate the animal, the dog, the horse, the cat.** See how they're moving, get my hands on them chiropractically. Maybe that's because I was first trained in chiropractic, but it really gives me an idea of what's going on.



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After I adjust them chiropractically, I reassess how they're moving. Are there any areas that are still tender? Are they completely better?

If they are better, I say to the client, "This might be all we need to do. But one chiropractic session is not going to cure anything, because we're dealing with the muscular system, as well."

Why? When I'm making minute changes to each of those little facet joints, the muscles will get a little sore. They will end up creating a problem, what we call a **subluxation**. We usually do at least one more time if it's an acute [not chronic] injury. Some need it more frequently. It depends on what is going on.

If an animal has a **prior injury somewhere else**, I may say, "Let's do some **acupuncture** as well." It works to **help with other injuries, other disease processes**. Maybe the dog also has **skin problems** or whatever else might be going on. I tackle that, as well. Adding **acupuncture to the chiropractic** helps **reduce muscle spasming**, so it **lengthens the time period between adjustments**.

If one small area needs focus, I may, instead of acupuncture, do laser as a means of reducing pain and increasing the healing. I like to discuss it with the client so we can make the right decision for the pet.

Any animal can be evaluated for chiropractic

Dr. Foltman:

As I said, I can't just look at the animal and say, "You don't need chiropractic." I need to get my hands on the animal and do the adjustment. Then I can say, "Yeah, they were pretty good," or, "They had a lot of little things that I had to work on. This is where I needed to focus."

So when they come for an exam, they're going to get a chiropractic treatment.

One exception - If the reason you're bringing the animal in has nothing to do with chiropractic, they need to go back to their regular vet. I've had that happen before.

For instance, if I see a dog that requires traditional veterinary medicine, I'm going to say, "We need to get that looked at first. Maybe chiropractic can help you down the road, or my other modalities, but first you need to do this other thing."

Maribeth Decker: Okay. Thank you. That really helps me understand how this works. Tell us, where do you work and how do people get to work with you?

Dr. Foltman: **For small animals, I work out of my farm in Hillsboro, Virginia.** Then on **Monday afternoons, I go into the Veterinary Holistic Center in Springfield, Virginia** that you and I share. We have a great group of people. We share clients if we feel somebody may be able to help that pet's problem.



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I do travel to see horses. Plus horses can come to my farm. I have an office set up to see them. I don't have a license for Maryland or West Virginia, so horse clients from those states have to come to my Hillsboro office. But I go out and visit most of my horses.



Dr. Kelly Foltman, DVM, CVC, CVA

Dr. Foltman began her veterinary career in central New York in 1992 at a mixed animal practice where she focused on equine care. In 1999, she successfully completed coursework in animal chiropractic with options for animals.

In 2000, she opened Willowind Farm Equine Services where she specialized in equine preventive care, breeding, and chiropractic, and chiropractic for small animals. In 2009, she also completed acupuncture training at the Chi Institute. From 2004 until leaving New York in 2011, she also taught disease and injury at Cazenovia College.

In 2011, she sold her practice to move to Hillsboro, Virginia where she subsequently opened [Dunthorpe Farm Veterinary Services](#). She now specializes in acupuncture, chiropractic, and dentistry in horses and acupuncture and chiropractic for small animals. She also utilizes therapeutic laser therapy work.

A lifelong horse enthusiastic, Dr. Foltman owns four horses with her husband and competes in dressage. She and her husband also run a small B&B on a 1790s farm in Virginia and are currently building a cider orchard and a heritage pig farm.

Dr. Foltman believes in building community enhancing the rural and equestrian industries in Virginia. She is a past board member of the Northern Virginia Dressage Association, president of the Loudoun County Equine Alliance, equine liaison for the Loudoun County Rural Economic Development, and chair of that organization's policy subcommittee, co-chair of the Loudoun Parks, Recreation and Outdoor Space Board, and board member of the Virginia Horse Industry Board.

You can reach Dr. Foltman for an appointment by emailing info@dunthorpeveterinary.com or leaving a message at (540) 668-6232.