

# ~ THE ENDO-TAPPING™ METHOD OF JP GIACOMINI ~

*By Dr. Cindy Reynolds*

*Senior Researcher (Biochemistry), Howard Hughes Institute of Medicine,  
University of Washington, Dressage Rider & Certified Body Worker (Massage  
etc.)*

**"Research is to see what everybody else has seen and to think what nobody else has thought."** Albert Szent-Gyorgi.

The difficulty in writing about this method is that there is so much to say about it and so many ways in which it is interesting and useful, yet it is basically so simple. It is a revolutionary method which bridges horse training and behavior modification with physical therapy and bodywork, which gives us humans a **practical and elegant door to the connection between us AND the body and mind of the horse.**

It is well known that **relaxation at a deep level is an essential element of superb athletic performance.** It is also well known that the relaxation response can be taught through conditioning. Entire subcultures of human endeavor exist as a result of the development of techniques for inducing relaxation in self and others. In the training and riding of horses, while there are many techniques and formats for training in many disciplines, across all disciplines relaxation and harmony remain elusive goals for many.

This lack of systematic relaxation produces tremendous problems for trainers, owners, and the horses themselves. Our ignorance of relaxation techniques in modern horse training and our lack of adequate time in most training programs to proceed through a hierarchy of training goals with a relaxed, supple horse cause many of the performance problems, injuries, frustrations, and disappointments in the horse-human relationship. The tension and apprehension experienced by many owners and riders blocks completely their hope of a full partnership with their horses.

In classical horsemanship during centuries past, at least in the idealized versions we hear of today, the possibility of supple relaxation in performance was enhanced by the depth of experience of both riders and horses. Traditions were rich; resources were great; lifetimes were spent learning the art of horsemanship; and young horses were handled in such a way as to ease them one step at a time (frequently with multiple handlers present) through the training situations which might provoke the flight response. Today, all too often, horse training is a one-person task, time is short, and competition demands are high on the hierarchy. It should not surprise us that the problems in our horse-person relationship parallel the problems in our families, our societies, and our world.

The western-oriented methods which have gained popularity with horse owners have spread awareness of the importance of relaxation outside of classical horsemanship. The goals of these methods have remained focused on the individual amateur horse owner, especially those relatively new to horse ownership, and while there is some detail in their protocols, they lack the benefits of the precise biomechanical awareness of more classical methods and are often costly and require extensive investment of time and energy. The art and science of Endo-Tapping™ arrive at a time when the horse world is badly in need of relaxation, suppleness, and harmony.

Equally important, the technique extends beyond relaxation into training techniques that, while derived from the most classical forms, are within the reach of everyone. It can influence virtually every

phase of the horse-human interaction, whether used for relaxation itself, or for stimulating elements of the movement patterns of the horse from the ground or from the saddle. What can take a lifetime to learn to do from the saddle can be installed through Endo-Tapping™ in a few weeks' study by the amateur owner or the professional trainer. This technique cultivates systematic relaxation in the horse and informs the handler in ways which improve his finesse and awareness.

As a research professional in biological sciences, a dressage rider, and a 30 year veteran of animal breeding, behavior and training, and human and equine bodywork, I have followed the development of the various (primarily Western style) horsemanship techniques with interest. I found parts worthwhile and usable, and other parts difficult to justify in terms of the kind of horse I work with, a larger horse with some physical issues and vulnerable hocks. Working on a small circle or even a large circle without being very correct about straightness and bend made me nervous.

I find that the body of work associated with Endo-Tapping™ offers a simple approach to many of the same problems addressed by the various western horsemanship protocols and many more, up to the most difficult and elusive problems that challenge upper level dressage riders and trainers.

Because I am a researcher by training and instinct, a licensed massage practitioner for humans and horses, and have now spent some months working with this technique, I have considered possible mechanisms by which the Endo-Tapping™ method of Jean-Philippe Giacomini works. As a massage practitioner, it is striking to me how quickly the tapping works. I could use ordinary massage strokes on the same muscles for quite a period of time and still not get the rapidity and completeness of relaxation that comes from tapping! This suggests a reflexive response, and that is what I believe it is.

I believe tapping works through several concomitant effects on the body and mind of the horse; there are obvious possibilities related to the physiology of muscle and nerve which are part of the modern understanding of kinesiology and biomechanics and which might explain effects of Endo-Tapping™ on the relaxation state (and thus the mental focus and ability to learn) of the horse in its first level application, which is tapping at specific locations on muscles of locomotion and balance. Second level application of the tapping yields other effects, including muscle balancing, stretching, true bending, balancing and lengthening of stride, and ultimately self-carriage.

The technique itself can perhaps best be described as interactive “tapotement” (this is a French term for percussive massage, one of the classical strokes, used most commonly in American bodywork for invigorating muscle, but used very commonly in China and Europe for spot relaxation when the instrument used is of an appropriate size and shape). This “tapotement” is interactive in the sense that the firmness of the tapping is modified to adapt to the behavioral reaction of the horse, and so the mechanism varies to some extent as the horse goes through the stages of reaction to the tapping itself:

- 1) Noticing (which may include some avoidance behavior, confusion with the request of an aid, or resistance),
- 2) Ignoring (becoming still, attempting to outwait the tapping) and finally
- 3) Release, the stage we are interested in exploring as a function of its possible physiologic mechanisms.

As I mentioned above, the effectiveness and quickness of this “tapotement”, especially once the response has been conditioned, is striking. Ordinary massage techniques like “effleurage”, compression, cross-fiber friction, direct pressure, and the like, require more time, are effective over smaller areas (there is a distinct regional effect with Endo-Tapping™, perhaps because of the penetration of the vibration through to neighboring tissues, thus integrating the nervous system

effects), and do not always result in the overall relaxation that this method yields, possibly as a result of endorphin release.

**It is of interest that, during the period of ignoring the stimulus, the Endo-Tapping™ protocol calls for increasing the firmness of tapping, sometimes to a level that is very firm, in order to secure the release,** and that horses vary enormously in their individual requirements for pressure of the touch and their rates of adaptation. Each part of the body varies with the individual horse as well, based on stored tension, body memory, and physical history. Old traumas, emotional residues from training techniques and devices, and positional memory all contribute, in all likelihood, to the response at each site that is tapped.

The first level application of tapping with each horse is simply to relax muscle and, with it, mind. How does this work?

In the muscle itself, there are two anatomical elements well recognized in the science surrounding the physiology of muscle that probably contribute to the relaxation effect. The first is the muscle spindle cell, a specialized nerve-muscle hybrid, which is embedded at particular sites in muscle and which acts in extreme situations to protect the muscle from tearing: when the muscle and with it the spindle cell are stretched very suddenly beyond the neurological limit programmed by the body, the spindle cell communicates with the central nervous system to cause the muscle to contract suddenly, which in turn protects it from tearing.

In human massage therapy, the muscle spindle cell can be manipulated manually by causing it to bunch, shortening the cells involved in sensing tension and communicating with the nervous system, and as a result the muscle relaxes whatever tension has developed through earlier stretching of the muscle spindle cell by trauma. In other words, the muscle spindle cell is "reset" to relaxation, causing the muscle cell to relax and return to optimal function.

The exact location of all the muscle spindle cells in each muscle is the subject of much research. Some mapping has been done to allow specific manipulation to effect change through this mechanism (refs). It is very likely that muscle spindle cells in the horse will be homologous, and it will be possible to clarify the role of these cells in "tapotement" in the horse.

So how might Endo-Tapping™ effect relaxation through action on the muscle spindle cell? Assuming a degree of abnormal contraction from mechanical stress, that is residual tension, in a muscle, "Tapotement", quick and direct as it is, might pulse a bunching of the muscle spindle cell(s) adjacent to the site of tapping. The mechanical force of the tapping travels radially through tissue around the site of tapping, so it makes sense that those spindle cells oriented in a radial pattern there would experience a reduction in tension in their nerve fibers, and send a message to the central nervous system which would result in relaxation of the muscles served by those spindle cells.

The second anatomical element in muscle resides at the junction of the muscle itself and the tendon, which attaches every muscle to the bone which it acts upon to produce movement. This element is called the Golgi tendon organ, and its purpose is the opposite of the muscle spindle cell: when its intrinsic nerve fibers sense a sudden stretching, its communication with the central nervous system causes a relaxation of the muscle. The purpose of this nerve programming is to protect the muscle itself from pulling loose from the tendon, damaging the musculo-tendinous junction.

In its action upon this anatomical element, Endo-Tapping™ very likely supplies the pulse of sudden stretching of the Golgi tendon organ needed for relaxation of that particular muscle as it responds to protect its musculo-tendinous junction. And it is that very suddenness of the impulse from the tapping that probably makes it so effective, as no time is allowed for resistance or bracing as often happens during manual manipulation and training.

In addition to the clear possibility of two physiological mechanisms for local relaxation by “tapotement”, as I mentioned before, there is the gross appearance of an endorphin release during Endo-Tapping™. It would be very interesting to measure blood levels of endorphins, as well as heart rate and other indicators of relaxation as the “tapotement” proceeds.

One must ask, what is the full description of release, expressed as we see it in the application of this “tapotement” technique in the horse? What we see is a variety of signs of relaxation: full exhalation, softening of expression involving the small muscles around the eyes, nostrils, and ears, chewing and salivation, and lowering of the head. What we feel manually at the same time is overall softening of muscles associated with these obvious outward signs. The local effects mediated by the anatomical elements of the muscle are only part of the overall effect. Clearly the brain responds to some systemic effect as well.

The possibility is also there that something about the tapping, the close physical presence and the repetitive contact, "means" something to a horse that we can only speculate about. Over the eons, the horse's evolution has created a program for flight, and as a flip side of that a program for rest (relaxation) and play (relaxed performance, our training goal). Everything that happens in the horse's natural world fits into one of these categories. He is informed by the horses around him in the herd. Somehow, perhaps, this tapping may sum up to a feeling of safety in his limbic system.

There are many questions raised by these observations. How many ways can relaxation be quantified? By heart rate? By vaso-dilatation, or dilation of the pupil in the eye? By galvanic skin activity? Can the involvement of the muscle spindle cell and the Golgi tendon apparatus be demonstrated? Neuro-physiologic studies do address questions involving both the function and the anatomical mapping of these structures in animals. Can the release of endorphin, or other neuro-peptide, be demonstrated? Presumably, if it occurs, it can be demonstrated.

How many things can this tapping method be used for? Calming? Promoting healing? Preventing and treating colic? There is anecdotal evidence for all these. This is something which needs to be explored, understood more fully, refined, and made available for the benefit of the horses in our lives.

**To Contact the MASTER, JP Giacomini: Call or Email: 859-748-9091**  
**[jpgiacomini@gmail.com](mailto:jpgiacomini@gmail.com)**

**And be sure to visit his website and BLOG:**  
**[www.jpgiacomini@gmail.com](http://www.jpgiacomini@gmail.com)**

Or locally contact Karen Copeland:  
[karen.copeland@mindspring.com](mailto:karen.copeland@mindspring.com)

Visit her website at:  
[www.doyouloveyourhorse.com](http://www.doyouloveyourhorse.com)