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The magazine for IETA-UK Practitioners and Students

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**ETin'UK EXCLUSIVE:
HERRRET TOUCH**

**Dog's Sense
of Touch**

**ANATOMY'S
PROBLEMS OF THE
SHOULDER**

Integrity & Intent

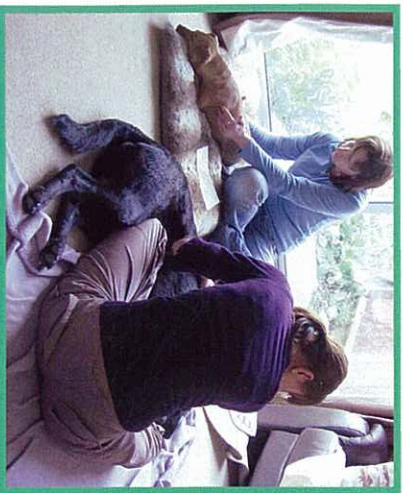
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THE DOG'S SENSE

BY HANNE GRICE,
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Humans and dogs share the same senses of smell, taste, hearing, sight and touch. The sense of touch is an important one as it aids communication for both humans and canines and is one of the five senses that we tend not to lose as we age, unlike sight or hearing. Touch enables us to determine if something is warm or cold, helps us respond to pain as well as light touch and deep pressure. But touch does more than just detect physical contact with our body; it helps us have an understanding of our environment. Early in life our brain and bodies rely on the sense of touch to enable us to grow. Research suggests babies that are touched grow a lot faster than if they are not touched. In fact, babies not exposed to frequent touch have shown delayed growth in development. Dogs also have a well-developed sense of touch, even if it is less sophisticated than a human's.



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its mother's nipple to get that all important meal is achieved by using its sense of touch and taste sensitivity. Using these two senses the puppy will find its way to the mother's breast area to suckle.

While receptors in the new born puppy's nose help lead it to its mother, it is the sense of touch, the physical contact with the bitch that has a calming affect and soothes the pup. Because touch is a sense that is generally well developed at birth, some scientists suggest that touch is possibly the most important of all the canine senses, and is overwhelming important for the development of a mature and sensible mind. Research has shown that animals deprived of touch are more likely to show serious behavioural disturbances and may be more fearful and withdrawn. While other research has indicated that puppies raised in isolation do not seem to know how to avoid painful stimuli and may also perceive

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pain differently.

A puppy's reaction to touch or its 'touch sensitivity' is considered when testing a young dog's temperament and its aptitude. Behaviourists such as Volhard, Paffenberger, and Fields have all developed tests that include reaction to touch. This is because all dogs are sensitive to touch and they use this sense to communicate to one another, as well as their human counterparts. It is often considered that if, during testing, the dog is too sensitive to touch, that dog may be harder to handle and train. When training dogs, we tend to use the sense of touch by way of a stroke on the head as a way of re-enforcing a good behaviour to encourage repetition of it, such as getting the dog to perform a 'sit'. Therefore, if a dog is overly sensitive to touch, particularly around the head and neck area where the collar and lead would touch, this makes any lead corrections difficult in training, and the owner may experience an unwanted or fearful response from the dog, if they tried to touch the dog around this highly sensitive spot.

Humans will hug or wrap their arms around one another as an act of friendship and love. While many dog owners hug their dogs to show their affection, in reality dogs do not hug! In fact, some dogs may not enjoy physical contact especially those sensitive to touch, while other dogs enjoy being stroked and petted. The only time dogs 'hug' each other is when the male clasps the female when mating or when a dog mounts another in a dominance display, or in play.

The importance of touch continues through out the dog's life. Stroking helps relax a dog that is in a heightened state as it lowers the heart rate and soothes. Moreover, we know that techniques such as Canine Touch help aid a dog's recovery from illness, injury and helps

with the overall well being of the dog.

Understanding our dog's senses really helps us understand how they communicate. All animals live in a world of signals and every species specializes in the specific use of a range of signals. A dog's representation of the environment must be very different to ours, since human senses differ so much. But in essence, both man and dogs' senses are the building blocks which thoughts and actions are constructed. As Protogoras the Greek philosopher puts it, "we are nothing but a bundle of sensations." ■



Book: *Freedheim, Donald (2003) Handbook of Psychology, John Wiley and Sons, volume 1, chapter 5, page 87.*