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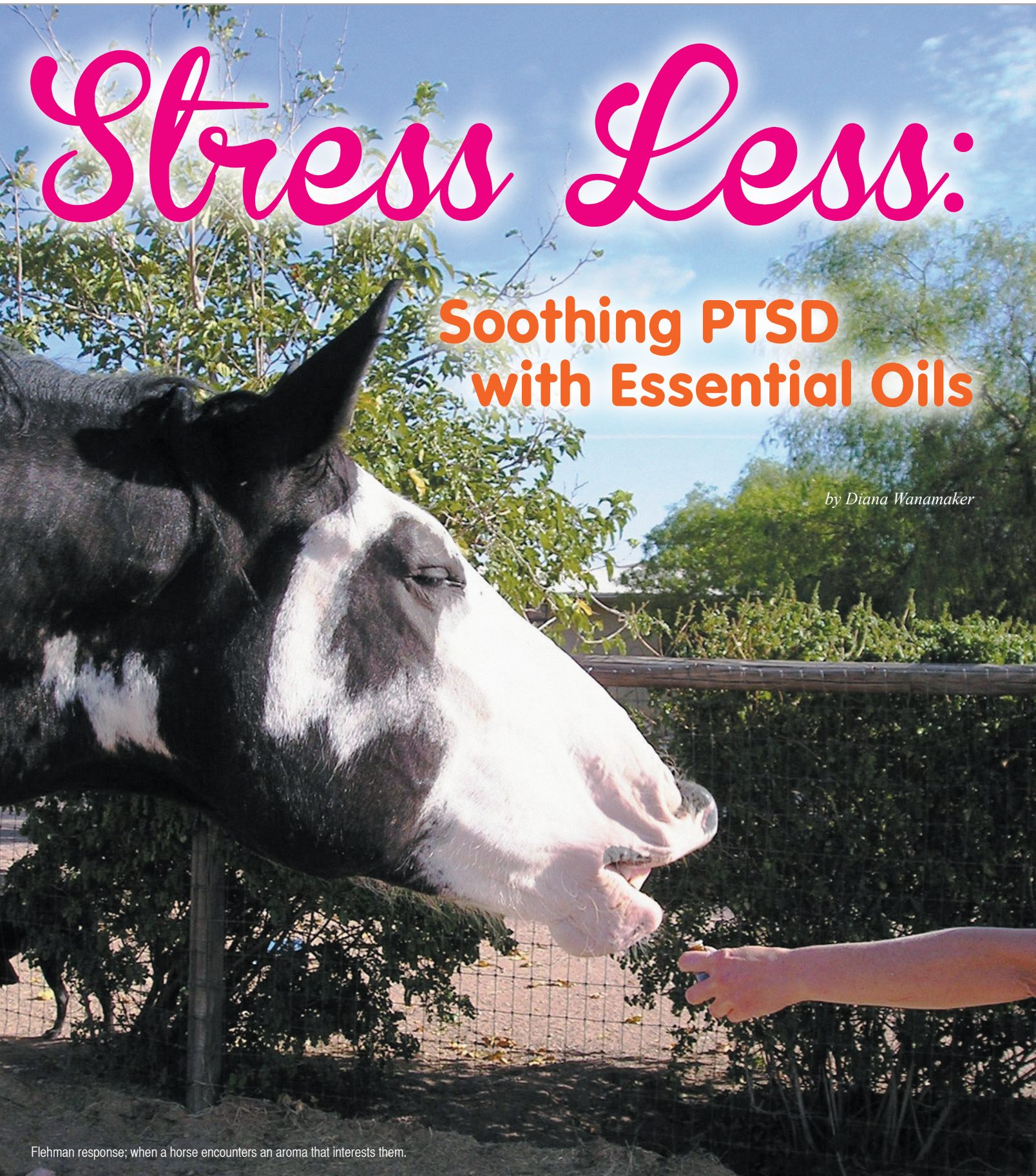


AMAZING AROMATHERAPY

Stress Less:

Soothing PTSD with Essential Oils

by Diana Wanamaker



Flehman response; when a horse encounters an aroma that interests them.

A cat becomes withdrawn, doesn't eat, and has multiple health issues. Her history uncovers she has lost several litters of kittens. A dog who hides under the bed suddenly exhibits exaggerated fearful behavior. The dog has a history of living in a violent home. A horse witnesses the drowning of his goat companion and becomes withdrawn, standing listless for days following the death. Another horse stands in a barn, the sole survivor of a tornado's damaging path. Wild elephants witness family and friends being killed by humans and exhibit signs of trauma.

Trauma experienced by animals is gaining more recognition amongst animal behaviorists and other professionals in the animal world. As we become more aware and accepting of the emotional lives of animals, we begin to unveil disorders that have been recognized in humans and are now being validated in animals. An illness called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is being identified and acknowledged amongst wild, captive, and companion animals.

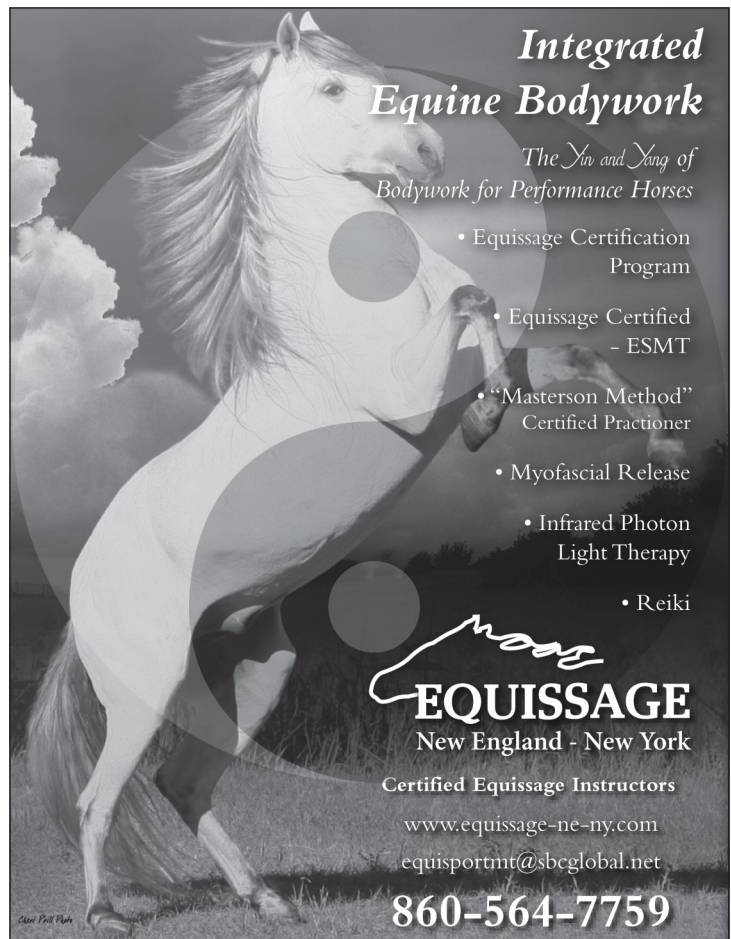
What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder is classified as a human anxiety disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV). PTSD is characterized by intense fear, helplessness, and/or horror resulting from exposure to extreme trauma.

PTSD can present as a "typical" anxiety response to an event and dissipate after several weeks, or it can continue for months and years to come. PTSD can begin with prolonged periods of withdrawal, dissociation, separation anxiety, impulsivity, etc., following a traumatic event. Once time has passed, life can be more functional with dormant stages offering more peace. However, reoccurrences can be triggered by external stimuli and may continue for a lifetime.

Triggers are feelings or memories associated with the original trauma and are very individualized. Following a trigger, uncontrollable symptoms of PTSD can occur – the individual is responding to the world around them as if they were reliving the trauma. It may be days or years before the symptoms subside; even then, this does not mean the PTSD is gone forever.

It can be difficult to determine if an animal with an unknown history simply has a nervous personality, or if they are actually experiencing PTSD. PTSD and an anxiety disorder is often a comorbid existence.



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The key distinction between an anxiety disorder and PTSD is anxiety is exhibited with a consistent history in response to a wide variety of circumstances and situations. PTSD is an intense response with related symptoms following a traumatic life event.



Above: A trailering accident is extremely stressful and can lead to PTSD.

Below: Severe neglect such as this starvation case can result in prolonged periods of withdrawal, dissociation, separation anxiety, and impulsivity.



Photo by Julia Reischel of Watershed Post.

Photo: Equine Voices Rescue and Sanctuary.

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What is a Trauma?

Most animals will experience stress in their lives, perhaps even fear or helplessness to some degree. A terrifying, life-threatening event is considered a trauma.

Here is a partial list of animal traumas:

- Abandonment
- Starvation/ dehydration
- Lack of adequate shelter
- Physical abuse
- Confinement/ lack of natural light
- Severe injury
- Exploitation
- Surviving catastrophic event (such as car accident, natural disaster, or combat situation)
- Hospital procedures
- Witnessing the loss of a beloved family member or animal companion

What Makes an Animal Susceptible to PTSD?

With personality typing being a common study with horses now, we know each horse comes with his own personality road map. Each animal is different and his history and personality can all play a role in the effects of a traumatic event. The more severe and ongoing the trauma, the more likely it is that the animal will experience PTSD. Experiencing the event alone, without companionship (animal or human), is shown (in humans) to make suffering more difficult to bear. A succession of stressful events can deplete resistance and increase the likelihood of PTSD. Layers of trauma can also make an animal more susceptible to PTSD. Travel, bullying, constant performance, early weaning, moving, breed, and temperament can all play a role. Some human personalities are more stress-resistant and the same applies for animals. Please see resources provided at the end of this article for additional information.

Symptoms of PTSD – A Partial List

- Avoidance (of places, activities, etc.)
- Cowering
- Lethargic
- Sad eyes
- Drastic and/ or sudden changes in behavior
- Sudden fear of familiar places
- Uncharacteristically violent behavior (i.e. towards a member of a certain gender)
- Cyclic patterns (i.e. weaving)
- Ongoing anxiety (“jumpy,” fearful, dazed, numb, or glossy eyed)
- Difficulty with change

Help for PTSD – Essential Oils

Essential oils consist of oxygenating compounds that enliven the body's cells, including those in the brain. Essential oils are a mixture of small

molecules capable of passing thru the blood-brain barrier (BBB). That is why essential oils are aromatic and act to promote clearing of emotional traumas. It helps release feelings of anger and mistrust and promotes a sense of calm that bring out gentle characteristics and a more positive attitude towards others.

NOTE:

If you recognize a symptom on this list, that does not necessarily mean your horse or pet has PTSD. A full evaluation by a qualified medical practitioner is necessary to determine if the symptom is, in fact, indicative of PTSD.

Trauma Life™ is a calming, grounding blend of therapeutic-grade essential oils formulated to help release buried emotional trauma. If unaddressed, emotionally draining episodes may be at the root of fatigue, anger, and restlessness. A calming blend of Frankincense, Lavender, Helichrysum, Valerian, Spruce, Geranium, *Citrus hystrix* and Rose.

Release™ combines uplifting, calming oils that stimulate a sense of peace and emotional well-being, which in turn facilitate the ability to release anger and frustration. Release promotes harmony and balance in the mind and body.

White Angelica™ is a calming and soothing blend that encourages feelings of protection and security. It combines oils used during ancient times to enhance the body's aura, which brings about a sense of strength and endurance. It is often used as protection against negative energy.

It can be difficult to determine if an animal with an unknown history simply has a nervous personality, or if they are actually experiencing PTSD. PTSD and an anxiety disorder is often a comorbid existence.

PTSD is a debilitating illness that is often misunderstood. It may leave a pet unadoptable, or a horse may be passed from home to home. Many of us love the stories of those who suffered and were rescued to be renewed by love once again. But the undisclosed stories are left with no happy endings. Many of these animals are unsung heroes. Having given of themselves, they, too, are entitled to a life of happiness. ☺☺

About the author:

Diana Wanamaker is an educator for pets and their people, with a special interest in utilizing essential oils. Misty morning rides in the hills of Epsom, England, were the early beginnings of a life long union with horses. Today Diana enjoys Trail Riding and horse camping. Diana has a great passion for making a difference in the health of animals of all kinds. Diana holds a Master's degree in social work, is an educator, writer & animal communicator. TarkWitezii@aol.com

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Dr. Madalyn Ward, DVM <http://holistichorsekeeping.com>

Brenda Forsythe Sappington, M.S, PhD (horse channel.com) "P for Personality" article <http://www.horsechannel.com/horse-training/p-for-personality-800.aspx>