

## Is your cat aching for a massage?

By Barbara Kohn

If you think a massage for your cat is taking pet pampering a bit too far, talk to Katie Mehrtens. She is a Certified Small Animal Massage Practitioner in Skokie, Ill., and the first thing she'll tell you is that pet massage is not about petting. "It's therapeutic and rehabilitative touch for all breeds of cats and dogs," she says.

Mehrtens became interested in holistic pet therapies seven years ago when her dog got sick. "My dog's turnaround on natural remedies was nothing short of amazing," she said. A few years ago, while on medical leave from her job as a special education teacher, she decided she was ready for a career change. "I thought being an animal massage therapist would be the greatest job in the world," she said. So rather than return to the classroom, Mehrtens got her certification from the Northwest School of Animal Massage. Last year, she launched her business The Right Spot Pet Massage.

### Benefits of cat massage

Mehrtens says that the strokes in used cat massage are similar to those used on humans. Massage also provides a cat with the same benefits, including increased flexibility, circulation and emotional calming.

She points out that massage can be particularly helpful as cats get older since their muscles are starting to atrophy. Massage helps relieve pain from arthritis by increasing circulation to the muscles surrounding a cat's sore joints. That provides some pain relief and eases stress. Older



**Katie Mehrtens works with Simon, a regular massage client.**

cats also often suffer from kidney problems. Massage helps because it dissolves the toxins that build up in the body and stimulates the blood flow needed to move them out.

"Massage is great for high anxiety, too," Mehrtens says. She includes among her clients a number of cats and dogs who have anxiety issues.

### How the cat massage session begins

Mehrtens begins each session by assessing the cat. She places her hands on the cat and touches lightly to see if she can feel muscle weakness. If she feels heat that tells her the cat has a pulled muscle or a

knot. "The texture of the fur—a dry or bald area—can also be an indication that something is going on," she says. "Your aim is to boost the immune system."

"We do everything on the floor and preferably in a small room with the door closed," Mehrtens explains about her process. "I use calming techniques and slowly pet the cat and then move into the general massage. I start on the head and move down the cat's body, trying to incorporate the limbs and even the feet."

Not surprising, Mehrtens says that cats just love the massage. If however, they don't like something she is doing, they'll let her know. Most often it's a gentle bite to say 'not there.'

**For more information on pet massage, or to contact Katie, call 773-329-7233 or visit: [www.therightspotforpets.com](http://www.therightspotforpets.com).**