

STRETCHING

for the Horse Owner

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STRETCHING FOR THE HORSE OWNER



Stretching should be implemented into every Horse's conditioning program, and if done correctly, should be safe for any healthy horse. Stretching should be done either after the horse has been worked, or during warm-up or cool-down, and after massage.

CORE STABILITY

Core stability and muscle strength are vital components in the maintenance of a healthy back in humans. Latest research has found this to be true for equines too. However, tools to implement core stability and strength are used to a lesser degree in horses, but should be implemented in day to day routines.

Growing evidence suggests that by doing exercises that aid in core stability and muscle strength on a regular basis, (up to 5 times a week) persistence and recurrence of back problems can be prevented! These exercises can improve the function of the deep spinal stabilizers which play a particularly important role in gait and movement.

STRETCHES FOR THE HORSE

Hind Limb ; stand to side of your horse, in the region of the hip in line with your horses leg facing to the back. Pick foot up at the fetlock, only just above the ground. When horse is relaxed, bring leg forward in line with the body. Eventually, repeat taking the leg higher off the ground.

Hind Limb; now turn around and bring the hind limb backward, staying near to the ground. Eventually, you can bring the leg nearer to the mid-line, and even take it across to other side.

Lateral Lumbar Stretch; stand at your horses hip, facing looking across his back. Grab the top of the tail with your hand furthest back and then place the other palm, pressing against the spine. Now gently push the spine away and pull the tail towards you. Hold the stretch then release. Repeat little further down the spine x 3



..... and please Remember

- * Never stretch a cold horse
- * Never battle with your horse, horses need to be relaxed to benefit from the stretch, go slowly and give the horse time, overstretching stimulates a response which causes tension
- * Work in a slow progressive way, hold a stretch for 10-20 sec. repeat x 3 and increase stretches over 4-6 weeks
- * Use a quiet time of the day, never tie the horse up during stretches, assess area to be safe for you and the horse
- * A stretching routine can be a good bonding aid, and can serve as a highlight for the horse on box-rest

RIDDEN WORK TO ENHANCE STRETCHING REGIME

- * Pole work
- * Lateral Work such as shoulder in, Haunches in
- * Sharp Steep Inclines
- * Marching Walk
- * Transitions (also within the gait)

UNRIDDEN EXERCISES

- * Positive backing up, at least 10 energetic steps
- * Long reining over different Surfaces
- * Lunging with a purpose, on a large circle, repeating the above
- * Tight circles

STRETCHES FOR THE HORSE

Tummy Lift ; stand to the side of your horse, feel for the gap in-between the two abdominal muscles and squeeze or press upwards. (depending on your horse) with some horses it is advisable to increase this slowly and get the horse used to the touch first .



Taking weight on hind end;

Stand to the front of your horse and gently push him backwards. (If that is the way you ask him to back-up, you might need to use a different command) As soon as his weight shifts onto his hind legs, release the ask.



CORE STABILITY EXERCISES



Chin to chest; stand to one side of your horse and ask him to lower his nose to touch his chest (c)

Chin to fetlock; again stand to your horses side, then ask him to lower his nose to reach in between his fetlocks. Always making sure head lowers in a straight line.



Theses stretches, over time, can be extended to the floor, reaching through the front legs towards the hind end. Make sure legs stay straight and horse does not bend the knees in order to reach the bait.

All these exercises can be repeated when the horse is ridden, using; stretching over poles for example.

LIMB STRETCHES

Fore Limb ; stand right in front of the fore limb you are about to stretch. Reach for the horses knee, straighten your back and stand up. Make sure the knee stays centered.



After a few weeks, do the same stretch, but lean slightly backwards.

Now bring leg back, behind the line of elbow , straighten it and set it to the floor.

Try and increase distance over time.



LATERAL STRETCHES

STRETCHING BENEFITS ;

- * Stretching can increase elasticity of the muscle which may lead to increased stride length and general movement within gaits
- * It can increase range of movement and lateral movement
- * Can aid in pain relief (reduce tension seen soften with scar tissue)
- * Improve muscle function & flexibility (better shock-absorption)
- * Can improve muscle strength and contraction
- * It also can aid in relaxation
- * But most importantly it will help to maintain core stability and spinal muscle strength

When not to Stretch

- * When not advised by Veterinarian, never use stretching as a substitute for thorough veterinary assessment, your Vet should always be your first port of call
- * When the horse has a systemic illness
- * Stay away from any area where a fracture is suspected or has been diagnosed
- * Undiagnosed Lameness

Head; stand side on to your horse, bend head to either side ensuring nose stays vertically to ground

Neck; stand with your back at your horses shoulder, guide head around you, making sure the nose stays vertically to the ground



Chin to rib-cage; guide neck around to horses ribs, standing to the side using a bate. This can be extended over time, to chin and to the stifle.

