

INJURIES COMMON TO HORSE PEOPLE

Crookedness In Horse And Rider

By Michele Leasure, MPT, OCS

Do you or your horse have to be crooked? The answer is no. The most common crookedness problem I see in riders is a left hip that falls behind, placing the right leg in a forward position and a right twist in the mid-back causing the left shoulder to be high and forward and the right shoulder to be low and back. In the horse, a right bulge and a left rotation in the head/upper neck and an inability to go straightforward are the most common crookedness problems. Both of these problems can be fixed with a better awareness of posture and by allowing the horse to travel freely with gentle aids to encourage straightness.

The Rider

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of correct posture off the horse. Correct sitting, standing, sleeping, and lifting posture are vital to proper alignment when riding and also for the prevention of back and neck pain.

The body must operate in midrange to allow proper muscle balance from right to left and from side to side. I do not accept the concepts of 'one-sidedness' and 'stronger sides' as an excuse for ineffective aids for straightness.

The most important posture to work on is not allowing a hump or slump in the mid-back. Slumping in the midback not only causes the neck and head to jut forward increasing tension in the muscles in the back of the neck and stretching the muscles in the front of the neck. The shoulders roll forward and the abdominal muscles become shortened. The diaphragm, which needs to be lifted to allow the chest to open, cannot do so in a slumped posture. Muscles in the front of the body become tight and the back

muscles become weak from being on a stretch. More importantly, the thoracic vertebrae get stuck in a forward position, which prevent extension of stretching upward. A rider cannot achieve shoulders back and correct leg position with decreased flexibility in the thoracic spine. Increased stress is placed at the base of the neck and the base of the lower spine.

Neutral posture requires a slight curve inward at the neck

(cervical) and slight curve outward in the mid-back (thoracic) and a slight curve inward in the low back (lumbar). Strong back muscles and stomach muscles are needed to hold the posture. Sitting slumped, working at computers slumped, standing with the hips jutted forward and the knees locked back, sleeping in a ball or on the stomach with the neck rotated, and lifting without using the legs all lead to posture problems that interfere with balance. The upper body must sit over the pelvis without the pelvis being tilted too far back or too far forward.

Exercises to correct posture
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Michele Leasure travels the horse show circuits nationwide. Questions for Ms. Leasure's column can be addressed to michaletemus@att.net or by calling (443) 610-7022.

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INJURIES*continued from page 65*

besides just practicing good posture include lower abdominal work (not crunches), hamstring strengthening, and mid-back strengthening (mid/lower traps, rotator cuff, triceps and shoulder extensions). If you feel like it is very difficult to sit up, you probably need to see a professional to unlock the thoracic spine.

The Horse

Having a defeated attitude that your horse is terminally crooked is not conducive to having a straight horse or getting the most out of your horse. Horses need to travel straight in order to use their muscles correctly.

Many people already write the horse off because they are on a show training schedule. Amateur horses or older horses that have

been crooked for a long time or bulge are the last on the totem pole to be encouraged to be corrected. What riders don't realize is that much can be accomplished at just the walk. You can encourage your horse to take hold of the bit in both sides of the mouth. You can also encourage his sides to follow-through, which help balance him. This is done on a loose rein.

Adult riders can work on their posture and their horses on light days by just being aware of how straight the horse is traveling at the walk. Letting your horse wiggle back and forth or walk off to one side does not help the situation. You can also practice walking over poles, making sure not to let the horse hit them with any foot. When the horse does not walk straight he will hit the poles.

Another important part of straightness is stretching each leg

forward and back to ensure there is equal length. Checking the range of motion of your horse before you ride is very important.

Awareness is everything. And if you don't take the time to notice or feel what your horse is doing, you cannot correct crookedness. The rider can practice a lot off the horse at home by standing on one leg or practicing squatting. When you squat, make sure you can squat sitting back without shifting right or left. If you have a foot that falls in or turns out, the leg will not be able to hold its position while performing these exercises.

Author's Note: I am not a horse trainer and my suggestions above are tried and true by me. I ride a lot of horses and have had a lot to do with rehabilitating problems in horses.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS JustWorld**
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Following the competition, a reception will be held in honor of the international riders, trainers, owners and sponsors participating in the CSIO. This 'by invitation only' event will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. at Belle Herbe Farm in Grand Prix Village.

JustWorld International held its first fundraising event, a 'Jump for a Just World' Training Show, on

Saturday, January 24, 2004. Hosted by Belle Herbe Farm, the event raised over \$97,000 in support of JustWorld International whose mission is to offer fellowship programs for students from around the globe to learn leadership skills, the tools that they can use to make a positive difference in the world. With seven project sites already located in such underprivileged nations as Cambodia, Rwanda and Chile and

several other project sites awaiting funding, students have the opportunity to work for change in a wide variety of environments on behalf of JustWorld International.

For further information on JustWorld International, visit www.justworldinternational.org or contact Jessica Newman at JNewman@JustWorldInternational.org.

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