



THE PERFECT BALANCE for EQUESTRIANS NEWSLETTER

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About the Editor

Michele Altemus is a licensed physical therapist and an equestrian in the Baltimore area. Michele has a Master's degree in Physical Therapy from Emory University and a Bachelor's degree in Kinesiology from the University of Maryland. She specializes in neck and back pain and injury. Michele has a broad scope of experience treating neurological and orthopedic injuries.

Michele offers seminars in the Baltimore-Washington area. The seminars include an hour of lecture and two hours of exercise.

Twenty plus years as a rider and competitor has given Michele great insight into the physical needs of the equestrian. Michele has suffered with a back injury for the last eight years and has still been able to ride and show successfully.

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Who Should Read This Newsletter?

- ♦ Riders
- ♦ Trainers
- ♦ Parents
- ♦ Equestrians

FEATURES

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- 3 Exercise #1-Wall Slide
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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Perfect Balance for Equestrians is a mobile physical therapy business designed for the equestrian. Last year, when I was showing in different states each month, I realized not only were there no physical therapy services available at the horse-shows, but that many of the riders I was seeing had neck and back discomfort or pain. Realizing that in a show atmosphere many of the riders, trainers, and parents had little time to attend to their needs, I decided to bring services to the equestrian. On the road I work out of my camper and at home in Maryland I work out of the riders' barn and home. What is amazing is that most equestrians do not dedicate themselves to any outside exercise program to counterbalance the physical work they do around the barn and on their horse.

My goal is to educate and teach equestrians how to care for their backs, improve their flexibility and strength, and most of all im-

prove their performance.

I never appreciated or even realized, until I injured my own back, how my physical condition affected the way I rode. I was a year-round athlete and thought I was in great shape. Simple imbalances in flexibility and strength directly affect our horses way of going. I was doing my horse a great injustice, by not properly preparing my own body for riding, paying attention to the joints and muscles that were used. Most athletes have a sport-specific program they follow, yet the equestrians I spoke with did not.

The spine is important to all aspects of horse care and can be injured very easily. Ninety percent of the equestrians I surveyed had some degree of back discomfort that directly affected what or how much they did with their horses. Ninety-nine percent agreed that a sport-specific exercise program would help to improve their performance. Why does the equestrian not take the time to address this aspect of their riding?

It is time for equestrians to do their part. Your horses are pampered probably more than your family. Stop putting your weak, inflexible body on top of your horse and expect them to perform their best.

Read and enjoy! If you have any suggestions or questions, please feel free to call me.

Sincerely,

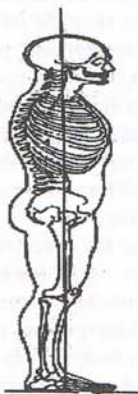
The Importance of Posture

by Michele Altemus, PT

Most equestrians feel the results of riding, mucking, grooming, and other various horse-related duties. Unfortunately, most do not know how or do not do anything about their aches and pains. The spine is a wonderful part of the human body, but without proper flexibility and strength, it can be the source of great pain.

One of the most important aspects of taking care of the spine is proper alignment. As children, we slump sit, cross our legs and stand crouched over. How many times did our parents say "stand up straight"? We ignored these comments when we were young, but like everything else adults usually know the end result.

What is proper alignment? Proper alignment can be assessed with a plumb line. A plumb line is a reference point for the body.



The plumb line dissects the tip of the ear and point of the shoulder, then falls behind the hip joint and in front of the knee and ankle joints. When the spine aligns with the plumb line the

three normal curves of the spine should be maintained. Maintaining the three normal curves of the spine is vital to proper muscle length and balance and joint mobility.

When one point is out of the line excess stress results above or below the joint that is out of line.



For instance, if the line fell from the ear to in front of the shoulder the base of the neck would be stressed (see above). This is commonly called "forward head posture".

Most frequently the neck and low back are strained. Horsemen tend to stand around with their head and hips forward and rounded shoulders. This posture is seen when sitting on fences, in stands, and around the barn.

Malalignment causes stress to the tendons, ligaments, and muscles around the joints. Persons with rounded shoulders develop tight chest muscles and weak, overstretched back muscles. If the imbalances are not addressed weakness and pain result.

Muscle and joint imbalances are one of the causes of poor balance. Many elderly fall because they have become inactive and allowed their joints and muscles to become stiff. Losing strength and range of motion at your joints does not have to be a natural progression of aging. Individuals who sit most of the day develop

tight hips which affects their center of gravity. If the front of your hip is tight you will have difficulty standing up straight without straining the low back. If one area becomes less mobile (hip) another area must become more mobile (low back). This theory applies to all areas of the body. Addressing loss of range of motion in joints is important to preventing injury and strain.

Riders tend to become stiff in the midback which prevents them from opening their chest and hip angles. Tension is carried in the neck, shoulders and arms and may refer pain to the low back. Imbalances require the rider to change his/her position which ultimately affects the horse's balance and the rider.

This is probably not the first time you have heard about posture and balance. Unfortunately, most horsepersons are too busy to ride, work, take care of the house and kids, plus perform exercises. You need to decide if you are making progress with your horse or are you dealing with the same issues and problems over and over?

Over the years I have seen many riders make the same mistake on the same horse. Usually all efforts go to correcting the horse with massage, more training, or changing tack. Bits specifically. The rider is looking for more control over their horse. Riders need to take a hard look at themselves. Correcting posture is just the beginning of better balance and performance! Better posture will not only improve your position and strength, but it will make work and school more tolerable and prevent injury in the future. **SCHEDULE YOUR FREE SCREENING TODAY!**

EXERCISE #1 WALL SLIDE

Purpose: Lengthen muscles that contribute to poor posture, neck and back pain. Aligns spine.



1. Stand with back of head, shoulders and buttock against the wall. Heels 3" from wall.
2. The small of your back should be one hand's width from the wall. Maintain this position by tightening your lower abdominals.
3. Face both elbows straight ahead and slowly raise your arms toward the ceiling while maintaining your position.
4. Do not force the position. You may only get your elbows to shoulder level the first time.
5. If you head does not reach the wall comfortably do not force it back.
6. If there is pain STOP!
7. Perform 5x holding for 5 seconds daily.

FACTS

1. *Back pain is usually not the result of one injury.*
2. *Poor posture and repetitive motion contribute to back injuries.*
3. *80% of the population will have back pain at one time in their lives.*
4. *An exercise a day does keep pain away!*

Why and how to choose a physical therapist.

In today's world there are many alternative health options when you have pain or injury. Most Americans want the quick fix. It may have taken years for them to get the way they are, but they want to be better yesterday. The key to maintaining healthy muscles and joints is regular stretching, strengthening, and aerobic exercise.

Physical therapists specialize in diagnosing and treating musculoskeletal dysfunction. As with other professions there are the good and the bad. Unfortunately, there are a lot of sweat shops out there that just give you a lot of heat, ultrasound, and exercise without ever discovering the problem. You could go months under this treatment and never

get better.

When choosing a physical therapist find out their specialty. Do not assume that every physical therapist is a specialist in back and neck pain. Physical therapists tend to specialize in certain areas just as physicians. Follow these guidelines when choosing a physical therapist for your back or neck:

1. Make sure the person who is treating you has graduated from an accredited program and has proof of licensure.
2. Hands on time with the professional minimal 20 minutes.
3. Aides, athletic trainers and exercise physiologists are only to assist your therapist in your exercise. They are not qualified to assess or treat your spine.
4. Manipulation or "cracking" of the spine is not a solution. It is a quick fix that needs to be followed by a program of exercise to reeducate and strengthen the dysfunctional area.
5. Ultimately it is your time and money. Make sure you are getting the attention and treatment you deserve.

Unfortunately, health care has changed for the worse when it comes to physical therapy. Big business and insurance companies dictate your care which force many physical therapy offices to cut treatment time and use less trained staff. There are still offices out there that continue to provide the highest quality care and put you only in the hands of professionals. Take the time to find these offices. If you need to be referred please call me.



**THE PERFECT BALANCE
FOR EQUESTRIANS**

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Visit Michele at the Capital Challenge
Sept. 26-Oct 4/ Fairhill International
Oct.22-26th



TRAINER'S CORNER

Trainers stop beating your head against a wall! If your students continually make the same mistakes and cannot improve their balance and position despite your spectacular coaching.

Look Deeper!

Most of us have decreased motion of one joint no matter how young or old. Set up a free screening at your barn today and get your students headed in the right direction. Simple exercises and very little time could save you a lot of headaches.

If you haven't improved their position and effectiveness in the last month there is a problem and it may not be their horse. If they have back problems, tight ankle joints, previous injury to their neck, etc. it may not be obvious to you or them. Some people can't get their heels down despite stretching everyday. These are the students you need to have

screened. I am here to help you help your student achieve his/her goals.

Call today! I will perform a free range of motion screening on all your students. Recommendations on exercises can be given at the screening for a minimal fee.

Make your job easy!

**ATTENTION
PARENTS!**

Don't be naive. If your children start riding young you need to be aware of the stresses of riding. Don't let your young rider form bad habits early. Start educating them on what they need to know today. If you are not sure yourself. Please attend one of my seminars to learn about the function and proper movement of the spine. Seminars include detailed instruction on how to properly stretch and strengthen the spine for better performance and less injury. You may learn something yourself.

Childhood hip problems, scoliosis, and leg length discrepancies all affect your child's

position and stability. Don't let your child set her/himself up for future pain and injury. It will end their career. Better balance decreases their chance of falling!

Ask your trainer to have a free screening performed right at your barn. It is the cheapest investment you will ever make in your child's health!

FALL SEMINAR

October 5, 1998

6:30-9:30pm

Howard County

Fairgrounds 4-H building

Call to Register

410-998-9473

**TIPS ON SITTING
POSTURE**

1. Maintain normal curves in your spine.
2. Sit in the back of your chair.
3. Feet flat on the floor.
4. Hips higher or level with the knees.
5. Use a lumbar support or roll to maintain the lumbar curve.