

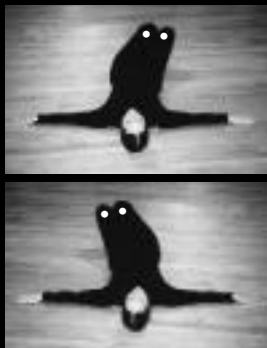
Flexibility

ESSENTIAL, NOT OPTIONAL

Holly Mason from the USA explains how a flexible rider on a flexible horse makes for a happier horse and a more effective rider.

Figure out your lower back and hips

Using each side of your pelvis independently is one of the isolation skills of riding. We sit on the bottom of the pelvis and the top of the femur (the thigh bone) which fits in the hip socket. The neck between the actual hip joint and the greater trochanter is where most of the muscles attach to move the thigh and hip. The bones of the pelvis and hip are challenging to visualize and it isn't necessary to visualize them medically, but it is necessary to know how even you are from side to side and how flexible around your hips and lower back. Discover how to analyze your flexibility with the exercises below.



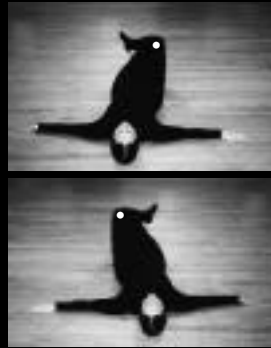
Knee Swings

Lay on your back with your arms extended to form a cross. Swing your knees from side to side as shown. Try to swing your knees to each side the same distance. Analyze which side is tighter through the actual hip and also at the base of your spine.



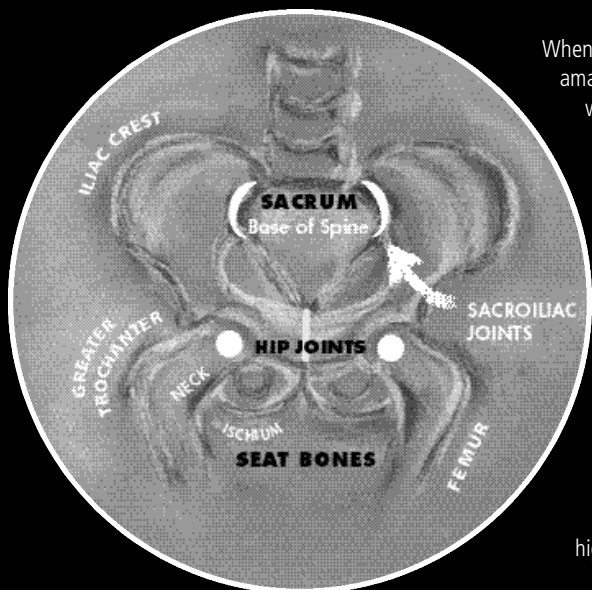
Knee Drop

Now drop each knee to the inside. This turning in of the hip and femur helps you feel the inner ligaments and tendons at the front of the pelvis. Again, the objective is to have both sides move similarly. If they do not, daily repetitions will loosen this area.



Cross Over Swing

Cross one leg over the other and gently pulse the crossed leg to the outside. This will stretch the outside of your thigh and hip. Analyze the differences between the two sides and commit to improving your flexibility for the good of your horse and for more effective riding.



When these exercises were shown to me I was amazed to feel how stiff my left hip was. I worked on it almost everyday just after getting up and it got much better. Like a lot of horses in training, I then switched stiff sides and the right was less flexible. As one side changes, the other side will shift into a slightly different alignment. This happens in your horse's pelvis and hips as they execute lateral work and become more and more supple in the hindquarters.

The added benefit to both you and the horse through side to side bending is the loosening of the sacroiliac (SI) joints on each side of the sacrum at the base of the spine. The horse's sacrum starts at the highest point of the rump and extends almost to

More Diagnostic Stretch Exercises



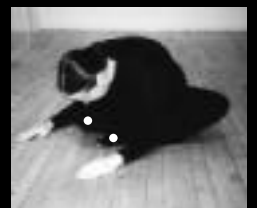
Elbows In



Elbows Out



Hip Stretch 1



Hip Stretch 2



the tail. A swinging back necessitates mobile sacroiliac joints. And, if we are going to sit the swinging back, our SI joints, hips and pelvis need to have equal and fluid range of motion.

The exercises dance and yoga stretches. I used to do them only before skiing or running, but now I do them every day and quite often twice a day. It is a very simple way to keep your back healthy and your body prepared for any challenging physical activity, be it work in the stables or high level dressage riding.

As riders, it is a kindness to our horses to pursue the study of why training exercises work. It is a bit of a mental strain in the beginning, but later on it gives one great problem solving skills to diagnose and reduce stiffness and resistances. Learn more so you can help more.