

Why Postural Change

Much Time

by Tina Watkins EESTEEBW3

A regular client of mine commented she was concerned that although she was doing the exercises and stretches I had recommended to develop her horse's posture and body condition, she felt the progress was slow. She seemed very frustrated that I continue providing her with the same information and she just wants things to change.

People often feel like they are doing the exercises and the work and yet nothing is changing. We need to then look at how we are doing the exercises and really get to the bottom of affecting a change.

Let's look at a transition exercise. It can stimulate the haunches, change the angle of the pelvis, elevate the forehead, target core tissue and stabilizer muscles, and act to quicken reaction time in the nervous system. This is still true even for Olympic-level flat work, because it is a technical movement even when just performed at the walk to halt. Riders tell me they work these transitions all the time, so why then is their horse's posture not improving?

It's the technical process of a simple exercise; it's the breaking down of what your horse is doing that is the key to understanding. Attention to detail, feel and depth of understanding of the movement that people are overlooking during the ride is what keeps the horse in it's current state.

To physically do an exercise is one thing, but to do it while analyzing what leg movement, neck movement, back and core movements, and spine and the hip, that is the key to unlocking postural struggles.

I have had people say to me "I can't concentrate on all those areas or feel all of that at once", and I don't expect you too. Unless you are at an elite level of riding, it is unlikely that you will be able to feel or



focus on everything. I am an amateur rider myself and I need the feedback from my body worker and my trainer – that's the key, it takes a team. There are just too many things happening and it happens too quickly to be able to keep up with it all.

So what does one do?

Focus on one or two top areas of priority. As you work through the exercise program that targets these areas, you keep an eagle eye on these priority zones and feel how the horse responds during the recommended exercises. This is vital to your understanding of what your horse is doing.

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Target exercises will often highlight the postural imbalances more.

You can feel it; you know it's there. Now what? Repetition.

I know we all want a magic adjustment that will fix the posture but when it comes to posture, accurate repetition is the only road to strength. Muscles have memory and they naturally fall into this 'normal'. Whether that normal is straight or crooked, once a muscle has normalized to a position, it wants to go back to it.


Think of a person with a broken leg. They will put their weight on the uninjured leg. Once the leg that was broken heals, they keep more, if not most, of the weight on that compensatory leg. Even when the cast is off they have a bit of a limp and more weight on that compensatory leg. The other leg is fine, so why did the body not automatically start using the formerly hurt leg? Muscle memory is one of the factors in this. The body has a new normal. And this new normal is continued until the posture is addressed with enough repetition for a change in the muscle memory to occur.

People say to me they feel they have been working on a postural problem for months, maybe years. Well it's all about hours spent in focus. Most of us ride for about an hour, maybe 4-6 days a week. Most of us try hard but maybe lose focus on the posture throughout the ride, so the horse slips to the old posture let's say 40% of the ride. So now we are working the horse in the new posture only 60% of the ride, and even diligent riders are only on the horses back 24 hours a month. That's one day!

Professional riders maintain focus on these areas and have a stronger body position, that remains

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Why Postural Change Takes So Much Time balanced, which allows the horse to focus on building tissue. The amateur rider will need more time or the guidance of a skilled eye to make this change. We really have to cut ourselves some slack. The goal of postural change involves a large commitment from the rider.

Lastly, never give up. Try not to let time make you feel like it's not working. Posture, balance, and health are part of a journey with twists, turns, hills and valleys. Enjoy the ride and know that any effort towards your horse's wellness is one step closer than you were the day before, and each hour in the saddle is never wasted time. 

Tina Watkins has been working as a soft tissue therapist since 1996. Fully insured and IEBWA member, she has strong veterinary relationships and values a team approach to horse care. She has an extensive education background and prides herself on yearly continued education to better herself and stay fresh in an industry she calls her passion. Horses have always been a fixture in her life, and the life of her family. Her supportive husband Peter is a farrier and her daughter Maddie is pony crazy as well. Tina is an FEI dressage rider and this allows her to take the body work knowledge to that practical level for her clients. Please see www.inhandequinetherapy.com for more information on Tina and her services.



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