

Correcting a 'Loose Lower Leg'

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[Back to Articles...](#)

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A lower leg that swings, is too far back or jams forward is a common riding problem. The root cause for the lower leg to not correctly 'wrap around' the horse's side is usually the pelvis being tipped too far back and the upper inner thigh muscles being tightened. This causes the thigh to rotate inward, which may appear as knee pinching. Gripping with the upper thigh activates muscles that turn the thigh inward (hence the knee pinching) and actually causes the inside of the calf to come off the horse. Many riders will compensate or be told to turn their foot out to get their calf 'on the horse'. This correction may eventually cause pain in the outer foot, knee or calf area, increase use of the heel (and spur) when using their leg and will prevent their calf from absorbing the forces of landing off a jump. This may in turn cause loss of upper body control on landing. To help position and stabilize the lower leg, try tipping the pelvis forward by envisioning the pelvis as a bowl with the water at the bottom, then tipping the water out the front of the bowl. This should feel like it creates more width between the sit bones (like the butt is sticking out). Letting go of the inner thigh muscles will then allow the knee to relax away from the saddle. Holding this pelvic position and keeping the knees from pressing into the saddle will help the lower leg rest correctly on the horse's side. Of course it must be practiced regularly in order to feel natural and become stronger. The hip fold exercise (picture 1 - from a previous article) and stretching the back of the hip and inner thigh will help this to become easier on the horse (pictures 2, 3 and 4).

For the sitting exercises the pelvis must be tipped a bit forward and the sit bones equally weighted as the stretch is added by pushing/pulling on the leg. The stretch should be felt in the back of the hip or thigh and held for 5 breaths. Doing 3-5 reps 3 or 5 times per day is ideal.

The inner thigh stretch should be held for 5 breaths 3-5 reps alternating sides 3-5 times per day.



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