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For Albertans About Albertans

## The human spine in motion...

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“Pull your shoulders back” is a phrase I often comment on. It accompanies “straighten up” and “push your chest out.” The image this conjures up is one of elegance, poise and ‘good posture’. That is, if there was no movement required and the rider could just sit still and look pretty. What these corrections most often create is stiffness.

The spine is designed to be curved like an ‘S’ (when viewed from the side) for the optimum combination of strength and mobility (it is all about physics). The lower back should be slightly arched and the upper back mildly rounded. It is a matter of degree and everyone is designed to have a slightly different amount of curve in their spine. Never in riding should either of these curves be reversed, as that compromises both the mobility and the health of the spine.

The job of the spine in riders, besides some of its more obvious jobs like providing a place for the head to sit, is to absorb the movement of the pelvis as it rocks on the hips in unison with the horse’s back (we are talking full-seat here). The spine must be able to undulate so that the head can stay still (bobbling heads are a sure sign of a stiff spine or hips) and so that the movements of the horse are not transmitted to the arms and hands. The video I have here demonstrates how mobile the spine needs to be to effectively allow the body to be independent of the seat.

So instead of ‘pulling the shoulders back’, consider ‘lengthen the spine’, ‘open the collar bones’, ‘grow tall equally in the front and back of your body’. These more subtle corrections are even more important in the aging rider as the overall spinal mobility begins to decline.

Lower back pain often occurs in riders of all ages who use the arched middle back position over fences. Riders who find it difficult to maintain the curves of their spine while ‘staying tall’ and/or closing their hip angle often have weak or inefficient core muscles. There are very basic exercises that riders can practice during the activities of their daily life to improve their riding posture (see next issue).



Please note this video will open in Youtube 