



Natural balance for your equine athlete

By Roger Lewis

I often get asked if a horse's back is 'out'. I feel it is a big misconception that our horses' backs or any other joint 'goes out'. Horses' joints, just like people, do not just go 'out' - if they did, there would be severe pain and no function of that body part.

In my opinion, a joint can be somewhat out of place, misaligned or better yet, I like to use the term 'locked up'. Every joint has a certain range of motion, and if that range is less than it should be, your veterinarian should be consulted and different options will be presented, often including chiropractic adjustment.

Each vertebra in the spine also has a range of motion, that when limited or locked could cause different symptoms. Some of these symptoms may be:

- Stiffness in the bridle, reluctance to break at the poll and be soft, or a difference in the lateral balance (the feeling of being heavier on the left or right rein). These symptoms usually mean a lock in the upper neck.
- Tight through the shoulders (left or right side, or just not able to raise the withers when asked), stumbling, or a shorter stride than normal. These symptoms are normally associated with lower neck or upper thoracic vertebra issues.
- Sore withers, discomfort when girth is tightened, or not wanting any leg pressure. This could mean mid-thoracic displacement, but if a horse shows these particular symptoms be sure your veterinarian has ruled out an ulcer or some other internal soft tissue problem.
- Lower back pain when palpated, reluctance to load up in the hind end, difficulty in executing lead changes, or difficulty in picking up certain leads. These issues are normally related to lower lumbar or sacroiliac (SI) locks. Again, be sure your veterinarian has been consulted to ensure there are no lameness issues in the hind legs. If the hind legs are sound, manipulating the lumbar can make a big difference in how your horse feels behind.
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These are a few of the main reasons I get asked to look at a horse and some of the effects when certain vertebra are locked. In most cases if a horse is sound, one adjustment can make a significant difference in the feel when riding. Horses, once unlocked, can maintain an adjustment better than people, especially when allowed to move around at their own will, with the option to lie down and roll.

There are certainly times when regular maintenance through chiropractic adjustments is necessary. Poor saddle fit, a rider who struggles with their own balance, joints struggling with arthritis, rehabilitation of a horse after an injury, and poorly balanced feet are among the major reasons that regular chiropractic maintenance is needed.

Finding the right equine chiropractor for your horse requires some investigation. It is important to consult with all of the parties involved with the horse (rider, trainer, etc) and to speak with other horse owners and trainers about their experiences with equine chiropractors. It is very important to involve your veterinarian in all aspects of horse health care. In my experience, horses don't lie - if adjusted properly a change in your horse should always be seen or felt.

I have always loved horses and I am very passionate about how we care for our regal partners. I have been fortunate to have been helped and healed from many incidents and crashes with the help of human chiropractics, which has further solidified my belief in the practice. I recognize that equine chiropractic adjustments are not for everybody, and that not every horse will benefit from being adjusted, but in my opinion it is one of the best and most important ways restore natural balance to an equine athlete.