

Stretching: I'm so pressed for time, I'm going to skip it!

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I think sometimes we all wish we had a magic time machine that would give us an extra day each week to get all the odds and ends tidied up. It shows up in all areas of our life where we are hoping to cut a couple corners, and just get to the next task. For our horses' sake, I do hope that stretching is one of the things that stays on our list, no matter what the time constraints.

Stretching has so many benefits, which include reducing post-ride soreness, breaking up adaptive movements, increasing range of motion, increasing flexibility, decreasing the risk of injury, elongating connective tissue, reducing muscle fatigue, draining waste products out of the tissue, settling the nervous system, and rehydrating the muscle by increasing the circulation to the area.

With the latest research on stretching, it is suggested that we should do some dynamic stretching before our ride. Dynamic stretching involves taking muscles and joints through their

full range of motion. By doing this, we slowly warm and wake up the tissue and the nervous system. This type of stretching is done through range of motion techniques, joint mobilization techniques, groundwork, and ridden exercises that take the body through that full range of motion.



After our ride we should do static stretching. Static stretching is the stretch and hold technique we all are accustomed to. It is important that the stretch is held to create the best benefits. Often this hold has to be built up to not only gain trust from the horse but to work through the stretch reflex response that is present especially on a horse that is not in a consistent stretch program. Stretch times can be up to 30 seconds to

really change the length of the fibers.

Another type of stretching is called 'baited' stretching, where we encourage a stretch using cookies or carrots as incentive. These stretches have to be done with caution for a couple of reasons: we don't want the horse to get aggressive



and reach around so quick that they could injure tissue and do us no good, and we don't want the horse to become a Cookie Monster! If done correctly these can be a great addition to any post-workout program.

The important take-home message regarding

owners may wonder if stretching is worth their time.

If you get a personalized stretching and joint mobilization program that is specific to your horse set up for you by a licensed and insured professional, and you are able to stick with the



stretching is that it has to be worked into your program to see the most benefit. Stretching is a progressive process that needs to be built up in the nervous system, the soft tissues and the joints to gain the results we want. To stretch your horse once a week will not give us the results and

program daily, you will start to see the change in the horse in about 14-21 days. Some horses may see results sooner, but for most athletes the program needs to be committed to in order to truly see some astounding results!

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