



Getting “Back” in the Saddle

While the coldest temperature in years has everyone thinking how to stay warm, it no doubt has many riders feeling a bit more achy than usual. For many, that would involve the neck and spine. Whole spine pain (meaning the neck and spine) due to arthritis is one of the top three problems facing the equestrian athlete. While specific treatment is highly individualized, there are general rules everyone can follow to address the pain and hence decrease its’ affect on riding enjoyment. With that, here are some suggestions to help get you ready to be “back” in the saddle.

1. Posture, Posture, Posture!

- Sitting, Standing and Walking, All day, all the time! How many riders had grandparents that said, “Head up, back straight”. Ideal posture is ear, shoulder, hip, knee and ankle joint on the same line with a slight hollow to the low back and braced abdominal muscles. The basics of posture are the same during sitting, standing and activity. While mastering technique does take practice, it helps reinforce proper muscle activation patterns needed for optimal on-horse posture. <http://vimeo.com/3906198>

2. Strengthen the spinal muscles

- Many people think “sit-ups” both regular and reverse. However as noted by Dr. Stuart McGill, international spine expert, “The spine can only flex so many times before it becomes injured. Why waste those times on sit-ups”. Equestrian athletes **don’t** need to perform traditional regular and reverse sit-ups. Once you learn the basics of posture,
 - Performing “the big three” (regular plank, side plank in knee/elbow position and bridge) on a daily basis effectively strengthens spinal and torso muscles while minimizing stress on the spine. http://www.backfitpro.com/pdf/selecting_back_exercises.pdf
 - As strength improves, variations on the big three such as the rider crunch <http://vimeo.com/11859543>, Prone plank progression <http://vimeo.com/11859003> and advanced bridging exercises using a ball <http://vimeo.com/11856941> or

<http://vimeo.com/11857107> or the first part of the hip work out
<http://vimeo.com/12549636>

- Cervical Strengthening is easily incorporated into spinal strengthening
<http://vimeo.com/5895991>

3. Stretching **everything** around it

- Daily stretching of the shoulders (especially internal rotation <http://vimeo.com/11700779>) hamstrings and quadriceps while maintaining optimal torso posture

4. Don't forget the rest!

- Riding stability on the horse starts at the foot/stirrup interface. Performing calf raises in two positions is an effective way to improve control at that interface.
<http://vimeo.com/11856093>
- Riding is whole body activity. Use whole body exercises to blend your newfound torso strength into sport specific movements. <http://vimeo.com/11855217>,
<http://vimeo.com/11855536>

5. About the sport

- As far as activities go, few are as hard on the body and specially the spine as equestrian sports. Bodily compensations, activity needed to take care of the horse; injuries and the forces passed to the rider during riding activity accelerate the wear on the spine. Current literature suggests the overwhelming number of equestrians will be dealing with some type of spinal arthritis by the age of 40. How problematic the arthritis is in terms of pain and disability is specific to the individual. Again the best way to address spine and for that matter any injury depends on the individual needs of the athlete.

Let Equicision help you by identifying those needs, then working with you to keep you healthy and in the saddle.