



Canine Postural Balance

Based on your dogs' postural assessment it appears as though your dog shows an asymmetry. Normally with quadriceps there will be a weakness shown in one area, and this weakness will shift throughout the body as the animal compensates. Be sure to check your dogs' personalized notes to see if it is a right- or left-sided asymmetry, and adjust the following exercises accordingly. As an example; if your dog is underusing its right hip, this hip will normally sit a little lower in the body than the left hip. When traveling on a circle, the dog may try to pop this weaker right hip wide to the outside of the circle when it is on the outside during flexion, and it will drop the weaker right hip down to the inside of the circle when it is on the inside during flexion. Due to this imbalance there will generally be less gluteal muscle in the right hip, less quadriceps tone in the right leg and less lumbar tone in the back. There is often left oblique and left mid-back soreness from this posture as well.

The dog may feel weaker in the right hind and often the handler will notice that the dog struggles with lead changes, lateral flexion, collection or engagement, and will notice a non-equal push from behind. Remember this is not lameness, but simply a case where the tissue on one side isn't as strong as the other and, as such, the body isn't working as efficiently as possible. This will create fatigue in the dog and, of course, fatigue is the primary cause of muscle and soft-tissue injury. Fatigue can even be linked to some things otherwise thought of as unfortunate traumas from overuse of tissue. Coinciding with this hip posture to balance itself, the dog will roll the shoulder to the left to help to balance the drop in the right hip. The dog will then overuse the pectoral muscles on the left as well as the muscles at the base of the neck, the result is that both of these areas often become sore.

This postural asymmetry can also travel forward into the neck, with the base of the neck shifting to the left with the shoulder, and the upper-neck shifting to the right

to ultimately balance the base. Often a problem that starts at the back of the dog, as with this example, will make its way forward to the poll. Similarly, a problem that starts at the poll will make its way back to the hip. The way to correct this posture is to address and focus on your dogs straightness. The dog must use all of its body parts equally. To simply say the dog is lazy behind will only allow the posture to continue in the dogs' body, and as the dog starts to feel stiff in the neck it can appear that the dog has a neck issue when the true origin may be in another part of the body.

Tips for postural balance:

- Focus and awareness, once you know what is imbalanced it is a lot easier to keep focus on it to change it.
- Find exercises that seem to challenge your dog enough. It is very easy with a postural imbalance to just say that the dog is stiff there and it is what it is. We should always be working towards balance.

Range of motion exercises:

Performed before and after work, as well as safe for the dog that has been taken out of ridden work altogether if cleared by the veterinarian or body worker.

- Neck/Rib Rock
- Tail Rock
- Quick Tail Pull
- Tummy Tucks
- Foreleg Lifted Rock Back
- Foreleg Sternal Lift
- Wither Rock
- Sternal Wither Rock

Exercises:

All exercise from the simple walk can be used to fix postural imbalance. It is the awareness of the shape the dog is working in that is the key. The following will help to target the body in both core and large muscle groups.

- Poles
- Cavaletti
- Hills both traversing hills and up and down
- Backing up

- Laterals like Leg Yield or Side Pass
- Flexion and Counter-Flexion

Stretches:

- Barrel Stretch
- Stifle Isometric
- A-E Cookie Stretches
- Clock Stretch
- Hip Tuck
- Lateral Hind End Tuck
- Tail Pull
- Leg Stretches - foreleg and hind
- Rocking that includes a hold time to be more of a stretch - Hip/Rib Rocking Neck/Rib

Feeling rushed? Do you need to get on the fast track to getting your dogs' fitness InHand?

I know how busy life can be, and I know we all want to do the best we can for our dog. If you don't have the time to do the complete program listed above with your dog, it's better to do a little work rather than skip it all. Choose one exercise a day from the exercises, range of motion and stretch list above. Even if you rotate through the above list of work on a daily basis, you will be making a positive change and helping your animal. Choose to do something every day, no matter how small will be a step forward in your dogs wellness program. When we work our dog in the peak and valley type of program with a ton of work for a few days and then nothing for a time, that we may actually be doing more harm than good.

Steady work towards your dogs postural goals will bring the results you want, and the more time you can devote the quicker you will get there, however slow and steady will win the race as well.

****NOTE: Therapy is not a replacement for Veterinary Care.****

