



When evaluating your horses back pain there are a lot of factors to consider; age, fitness, saddle fit, your horses' posture, your posture in the saddle, your horses' muscle tone, and even the type of work your horse is doing.

Back pain can be a bit of a vicious circle, when your horses' back is sore, he/she doesn't want to engage it, so it loses muscle and becomes weaker; when weaker your horse fatigues faster and won't stay engaged and round, if they won't stay round they will invert resulting in a dropped back, and their back soreness is amplified. The first thing to watch for with back pain is fatigue. A horse with a sore back needs a lot of breaks. Those breaks can vary in length but they will need to be placed well to allow the horse to drain wastes from the already compromised tissue. Your job as the rider will be to keep an excellent connection with your horse in order to decide if the tissue requires a break time, and appropriate duration.

Try to avoid the sitting trot, or use the sitting trot in short spurts intermixing it with rising (half seat or 2 point position) in order to allow their back to recover.

Minimizing exercises where the back is taking impact, like jumping, cutting cows, slide stops, roping, high collection etc. Impact exercises will all be added back incrementally as the back heals and rebuilds in strength. Never use your horse as a couch to stand around and visit or even for a sustained period when discussing with your coach or waiting for fellow lesson participant to take their

turn. Dismount so that the core tissue won't have to stay turned on to support your weight, this will eliminate unneeded stress on a compromised back.

Tips for working with back pain:

- Application of heat (can be used before and after work). Use 12-18 min of heat before the horse is ridden.
- Therapy products that increase circulation.
- Light to moderate massage using your hand or if the horse allows it a massage mitt to increase circulation and stimulate nerves.
- Try not to give more than 2 days off in a row (unless instructed by a member of your equine wellness team). Tissue building is best done with a very consistent program.

Exercises:

Hand walk your horse to warm up and to cool down. This allows the tissue to gain circulation and muscle exchange without also having to hold the contraction required to hold the rider weight. Cool down times are often too short and a horse with back issues will need 15 min as a minimum riderless to clear wastes.

In-hand work:

- Longeing in a frame with side reins
- Poles
- Cavaletti
- Turn on forehand and turn on haunches
- Labyrinth
- Hill work; up hills, down hills (low grade only - it

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may put too much strain on horse if the grade is too great) and side-hill work.

- Backing; both in a straight line and on a circle
- Zig zag laterals
- Figure eight or small diameter serpentine
- Footing change

Ridden work:

Depending on the severity of soreness, ridden work may be limited to large figures and straight lines. As the horses' pain eases, smaller figures and more engagement can be added. This stage should be asked for as quickly as the horse can tolerate, as without it there will be a limited increase in the level of tone. The level of work will depend on what we have found with your horse today.

-The above in-hand work can all be done under saddle once strength is established from the ground work.

-Flexion work; serpentine, spirals, figure eights.

-Lateral work; leg yield, shoulder in/out, shoulder yield, half pass, side pass.

-Transitions; both up and down as well as within the gate. As your horse strengthens, it's body will benefit from transitions that span a gate.

Range of motion exercises:

Performed before and after work, as well as safe for the horse that has been taken out of riding work altogether.

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

- Sternal Wither Rock

Stretches (performed after work)

- Tummy Tucks
- A-E Cookie Stretches
- Barrel Stretch
- Rib/Hip Rock
- Neck/Rib rock
- Wither Rock
- Hip Tuck
- Lateral Hind End Tuck
- Psoas Stretches
- Tire Stand
- Tail Rock
- Tail Pull
- Quick Tail Pull
- Sternal Wither Rock

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

I know how busy life can be, and I know we all want to do the best we can for our horse. If you don't have the time to do the complete program listed above with your horse, 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 horses wellness program. When we work our horse 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.

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

