



Equine SI Pain

When dealing with a horse with SI pain there are many factors to consider. The horse's SI joint is an integral part of your horse's ability to move. The Sacral Iliac joint (SI) is where the pelvis and the spine (sacrum) come together or articulate. The SI joint is the place that the body takes the power created from the hind end and sends it through the spine. Assessment of the pelvis balance and range of motion will determine what is happening within the joint and the pelvis itself. This will be a key to healing any asymmetry.

The SI joint is supposed to be very stable and offer very little movement. Due to the work we do with our modern horses, this joint takes a lot more torque than it may have been intended to tolerate. Pain in this area will reduce the range of motion of the back, hips and hind legs. A horse with SI pain may not be overtly lame but may seem 'just not right'; the horse may not have the same spring in its step, may find exercises it once found easy to be more difficult, or simply may not have the same verve for work. When a horse is protecting this area of its body, they tend to lock in the lumbar and upper Gluteal muscles, thereby making back pain increase and force the range of motion to decrease. Veterinary assistance may be needed to settle this area down and help us reduce pain. This will allow the horse to work correctly enough to start to build with specific exercises and stretches. Your horse's health care team should determine the level of difficulty of these exercises. Once we are positive this problem is correctly diagnosed and we can categorize the severity of the problem, the following soft tissue therapy exercises can be done:

Severe soreness: This horse is in a lot of pain and may have pathology that has been or needs to be diagnosed by the Vet. Exercise is taken down to the very basics. Often 2-4 weeks of hand-walking and trotting are required to settle the area down and allow the tissue some time to repair. During this time your horse's health care team should determine how much work the

horse is allowed to do. Once the acute level of soreness is alleviated then the strength and range of motion building program can begin. This can be a long process however the time invested will be well worth it.

Moderate soreness: This horse is functionally sound and is in full work but is showing outward signs of pain in area. The horse physically drops when palpated in the area, is resentful to do range of motion in the joint and is showing physical imbalance in the spine where the hunters bump and possible lumbar vertebrae hills and valley are visible. The horse is not able to complete all tasks asked of it and is struggling to hold collection and coil the loins. The horse should do one day of groundwork, followed by one ride day. Having the ground day in between ride days will allow the body to build without too much soreness created from having to hold weight of the rider up. Both ride and ground day should include Hand-walking to warm and cool down the horse up for 10-12 minutes. If you find the horse is slow to warm up add in In-hand trotting (no lunge circles) 5-7 minutes. Then start on the exercises therapy below.

Low-grade soreness and injury prevention: This horse just has some stiffness or mild soreness in the area. This may also be a horse that you feel is conformationally challenged in this area and you wish to work on building the strength. All of the below exercise therapy will be appropriate

Tips for working with SI pain:

- Have your horse's postural balance checked.
- Check saddle, padding, hind leg boots and anything that affects the horse's back and hip.
- Application of heat (can be used before and after work). Use 12-18 min of heat.
- 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.

- Use the Hip Rock, Quick Tail Pull, Stifle Isometric and Tummy Lift technique to warm the tissue and mobilize the joints before work.
- Try not to force the back, hip, or hind leg into a static posture with training aids that force a shape, the muscle will not be able to have full range of motion and this will only encourage more stiffness.
- Use hind leg dangle bracelets to stimulate lift and reach.

Exercises:

Ensure your horse has an adequate warm up and cool down; muscles need that circulation to function at their best. Encourage the hind leg to move during this time and work through full range of motion.

Inhand work

- Poles
- Cavaletti
- Turn on haunches
- Labyrinth
- Hill work; up hills, down hills, and transverse (across) hills, gait transitions on the hill going up or down the grade.
- Backing; both straight line and circles
- Zig Zag laterals
- Figure 8 or small diameter serpentine

Ridden work

Sore hips and SI joints often take a long time to warm up; taking the time to do some ground work will pay off. If you choose not to do the extra ground work, you will need to take a longer time in the saddle in the warm up phase, moving the hind end around, through full range of motion and really ensuring there is adequate circulation in the muscles to start the training phase of the ride.

- All of the above exercise can be done as well under saddle once tissue is warm.
- Flexion work; True flexion, Counter Flexion, Serpentine, Spirals, Figure 8's
- Lateral work; leg yield, Haunches in and out, hip yield, half pass, side pass.
- Transitions; both up and down as well

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as within the gait, gait transitions in a straight line and on a circle.

- Backing; in a straight line and on a circle. Long lines of backing will really target range of motion 25-40 steps.
- Roll backs, Pirouette work in the walk or canter. Only if horse is at strength building level.
- Gymnastic Jumping

Steady work towards your horses' 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.

Range of Motion Exercises

Should be performed before and after work; also safe for the horse that has been taken out of ridden work altogether.

- Rib/Hip Rock
- Quick Tail Pull
- Stifle Isometric
- Foreleg Lifted Rock Back
- Tummy Tucks

Stretches

- Tummy Tuck
- Stifle Isometric
- Rib/Hip Rock
- Hindleg Stretch
- Tail Pulls
- Cookie Stretches
- Psoas Stretch
- Barrel Stretch
- Lateral Hind End Tuck

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, we may actually be doing more harm than good.

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