



Equine Sternum Drop

When dealing with a horse with sternum drop there are many factors to consider. The horses' thorax posture is an integral part of your horses' ability to move. Sternum drop is a term that describes a horse dropping its thorax down between the forelegs. The horse, unlike us has no clavicle, this means that the thorax (the horses wither and upper back, rib cage, and sternum) is being held between the forelegs by muscular and soft tissue effort. The region can not only move up and down but can roll within the two front legs. Sternum drop is a serious postural issue. The horse will be over-developing the underside of its neck and hollowing out the upper back as the thorax lowers between the shoulders. As the sternum drops down, the shoulders become more pronounced, making the placement and fit of a saddle very difficult. This posture also places pressure and strain on the pectoral muscles which can interfere with the comfort of the girth. There can be a roll factor to the lowering of the sternum that can make the rib cage not balanced between the forelegs. This can put unequal stress and weight bearing asymmetry on the forelegs themselves. Additionally as the sternum drops down the horse will feel compensation in the lumbar and SI area. This low back pain can create a vicious circle of events, as the horse will rock the weight further forward off its hind legs to alleviate the back pain. This is where soft tissue therapy is needed to balance the tissue and alleviate pain.

Tips for Working with Sternum Drop Posture:

- Check saddles, pads, surcingles, girths, and any other tack or devise that is placed in this region for fit.
- 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 Sternum Lift, Belly Lift, and Wither Rock technique to warm the tissue

and mobilize the joints before work.
-Try not to force the horse 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.

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 forehand
- 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 serpentines
- Tire stand

Ridden work

When dealing with any postural imbalance, tissue can 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 neck, ribs and back 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, Serpentines, 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 as within the gait, gait transitions in a straight line and on a circle.
- Backing; in a straight line and on circle

- Collection work; Half Steps, Piaffe rocking the weight back to the haunches.
- Gymnastic jumping

Range of motion exercises

Performed before and after work, also safe for the horse that has been taken out of ridden work altogether.

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

Stretches

- Cookie Stretches
- Clock Stretch
- Ridgway Hyoid Stretch
- Poll Nod
- Neck/rib Rock
- Sternal Wither Rock
- Wither Rock
- Foreleg Stretch
- Foreleg Sternal Lift
- Barrel Stretch
- Neck/rib Push Push

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.

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.

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

