



Equine Stifle Pain

When dealing with a horse with stifle weakness or pain there is many factors to consider. The horses' stifle is an integral part of your horses' ability to move. Your horses' quadriceps is one of the hardest muscles in the body to develop and we see this muscle underused in horses often. This muscle group is located above your horses' stifle; the quads lift the hind leg forward and also have some adduction and abduction roles. Often our horses propel themselves forward with their hamstrings and gluteals and underuse the quads in the forward flight path. Low quad tone will lead to hip instability, lumbar and mid back pain, hip pain, and hock pain (overused hamstrings). The horse has to truly engage to use his quads: a long, low or hacking style frame will not encourage the quads to fire. This does not mean we all have to turn into dressage riders, but we do have to bring our horses together and work engagement on our strength-building days. We often see the quadriceps muscle group underused due to compensating for back and SI pain or weakness. The body has to flex these regions as the horse takes that larger step under the body, or try's to increase engagement. Zones that hold pain are restricted in movement. Horses can get away with under using the quads and not truly engaging the stifles because they use the momentum created in locomotion by the hamstrings and reciprocal apparatus to have the hind leg come forward under the body. They then don't have to truly engage the quads and hip flexors to create real reach under the body. Your horses' hip and hind end posture needs to be evaluated to ensure balance within your horse. A horse with weak adductors or abductors will roll the stifle to the outside and inside respectively and not only not travel with a imbalance in the flight path but create torque that travels the length of the leg, hip and into the back.

Tips for working with stifle pain:

- Have your horses postural balance checked.
- Check saddle, padding, hind leg boots and anything that affects the horses

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 and Stifle Isometric 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 serpentines
- Half steps, Inhand collection work, and Piaffe

Ridden Work

Quads and hip flexors 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 as within the gait, gait transitions in a straight line and on a circle.
- Backing; in a straight line and on a circle
- Roll backs, pirouette work in the walk or canter

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

Stretches

- Cookie Stretches
- Lateral Hind End Tuck
- Hip tuck
- Stifle Isometric
- Rib/Hip Rock
- Tail Pull
- Hind leg stretch

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

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





Equine Stifle Pain Continued

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.****

