



Murdoch Method Presents the Ride Like a Natural[®] Reader Series

The Effortless Rider[®]

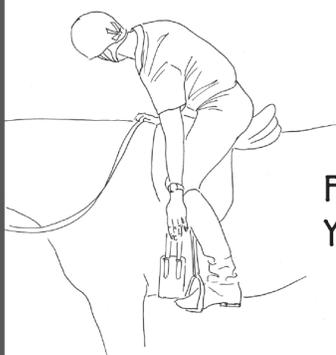
Find new possibilities of movement
to enhance your riding

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By Wendy Murdoch, M.S.



Free Your
Rib Cage



Find
Your Hips



Lengthen
Your Spine



Plus...

Get Your Heels Down

Shim Your Stirrups

Improving Your Weight Aids

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This booklet is dedicated to Moshe Feldenkrais, whose life's work and vision transmitted by his students, my teachers were the inspiration for the Effortless Rider.

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Preface

The *Effortless Rider Reader* is a collection of articles I wrote over a period from 2002 - 2007. These articles appeared in magazines including USDF Connections, Eclectic Horseman Magazine, Equine Wellness Magazine and The Trail Less Traveled. I have chosen them as an introduction to the theme for this Reader, The *Effortless Rider*®. Hopefully I will be able to expand the concept into a book, but, of course, that takes time. As most of my students want something now I thought this collection would be a good start.

The first article is about the Feldenkrais Method®. I became a Feldenkrais® Practitioner in 2005. I took the 4 year, 800-hour training partly to help my body which has been damaged by riding accidents over the years, partly to help me teach riding using less effort and partly as a potential career later on when I get tired of getting cold and wet teaching riding outside. I must say as hard as it was to fit the training into my schedule it was worth it!

Next I have included 3 articles that offer you warm-ups you

can do when you first get on your horse. Please take your time with these lessons. Go slowly and gently so you can discover new ways of moving that improve both you and your horse.

In addition there is an article on leveling your stirrups to help you find a solid foundation for your foot in the stirrup, and there is an article to help you get your heels down. This is a sticky point for many folks. Hopefully this article will help.

Finally the Pelvic Clock lesson is a wonderful lesson you can do off and on the horse. The Pelvic Clock is perhaps the most well known of all Feldenkrais' work.

You might be amazed at how free you can feel in your hips and pelvis after this lesson!

So while you are going around the Clock or experimenting with your ankles notice how this makes the ride easier, less painful and maybe even effortless. I am sure your horse will appreciate your newfound freedom of movement. And remember to enjoy the ride!

Wendy Murdoch

About Wendy

Wendy Murdoch has ridden since childhood in a variety of disciplines including Hunters, Dressage, Eventing, and Reining. In 1984 while working towards her PhD in Equine Biomechanics, Wendy incurred a severe riding accident. The accident changed the course of her life from theoretical study to applied biomechanics for both horse and rider. As a result, Wendy has been teaching internationally for over 18 years. Her goal is to make riding more enjoyable and fundamentally simple by showing her students how to achieve what great riders do naturally.

Wendy's students range in disciplines from Dressage, Eventing, Reining, Hunters, Jumpers and pleasure/trail. Wendy works with riders of all abilities, levels, and ages. The principles she teaches are fundamental to all riding. They are refined and specific in order to benefit not only average riders, but also those at the top levels of competition. Wendy's thorough knowledge of anatomy, biomechanics and teaching gives her a wide range of tools to assist each rider to achieve their goals.

Wendy holds a Master's Degree in Equine Reproductive Physiology from the University of Kentucky (1986). Her background includes intensive study with Linda Tellington-Jones, Founder of TTEAM®; and Sally Swift, Founder of Centered Riding®. In 1992 Wendy became one of an elite group of people to apprentice under Sally Swift. She has also worked closely with Dr. Joyce Harman, holistic veterinarian and noted authority on saddle fitting; Bettina Drummond, an authorized representative of the Nuno Oliveira School in North America; Jon Zahourek, creator of Zoologik®, Equiken Anatomy in Clay® system for learning anatomy; and Dr. Hilary Clayton, recipient of the McPhail Chair at Michigan State University to study biomechanics in dressage horses.

Wendy believes that continuing education is essential to achieving her goals. In 2005 she completed the 4-year training, and is now a *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner*™. As such Wendy now has more ways of presenting the fundamental riding principles to her students. In addition Wendy continues to study anatomy. She has completed the Zoologik®, Equiken®, Advanced Equiken®, Maniken®, and Comparative Anatomy



courses. In addition Wendy has organized and participated in two courses with Dr. Hilary Clayton: Anatomy, Conformation and Biomechanics Workshop (2004) and The Dynamic Horse Seminar (2005). Wendy has traveled to Europe to further her education by attending the Global Dressage Forum (2004-05) in Tilburg, The Netherlands and has had the opportunity to work with Arthur Kottas-Heldenberg, Retired First Chief Rider of the Spanish Riding School, considered the best Dressage rider in Europe in 1998.

In addition to her teaching, Wendy takes time to write. Her articles have appeared in numerous magazines including *Dressage & CT*, *Equus*, *Practical Horseman*, *The Trail Less Traveled*, *Eclectic Horseman*, and *USDF Connections*. Her first book *Simplify Your Riding* was released in March of 2004. In her writing she uses visual images, clear illustrations and kinesthetic exercises to help the rider feel, see, and understand the concepts presented. Wendy is committed to making complicated riding concepts easy to understand in common language.

In 2006 Wendy released her *Ride like a Natural*® DVD series parts 1-3.



The Not-So-Frequent Rider

I don't ride every day.

I wish I could. In fact if I get on a horse once a week I'm doing well. Well, that is not entirely true either. I actually ride every day. In fact I probably spend most of my day on a horse. Does this sound like a paradox? Well, everything I do in my life I relate to riding. Whether that is driving my car, walking down the street, or modeling for my students.

You see, I am a Riding Instructor by profession. I have to admit it is a pretty good job. I've worked for myself, for the past 10 years in fact. I really like being my own boss although anyone who is self-employed knows that you miss getting paid vacation time and bonuses at Christmas. I get to travel all around the world and teach people how to communicate better with their horses and make riding more of a joy in their life. Me, I ride lots of airplanes, highways, back roads and computers organizing and traveling to clinics. Everyone thinks I have the life. Traveling to places like New Zealand every winter. Next year I will even be taking people on a Centered Riding Safari in Africa.

Well, I have half a life. The other half suffers silently waiting her turn— the opportunity to have my own horse and spend part of every day in a relationship with a hairy-thousand pound beast that drools at the sight of a carrot coming towards it. Sometimes you wonder how that can be enough - a simple scratch on the withers or a few ear strokes and these enormous creatures want to

months at a time, but they were other people's horses that needed lots of help or were lame. So that sweet relationship has eluded me for the majority of my life. I have had a horse for a total of 4 years out the past 40. Humm..... I have to wonder sometimes.

Actually, traveling and doing clinics does provide me with endorphins. It is very rewarding to watch the horses begin to breathe as the rider does, and lower their head six inches when I release someone's hip joint, and raise their back as the rider releases in the pelvis. I think the horses know that somehow I have made their life better by showing their riders how to breathe and soften in their hip joints and in general be more comfortable on their backs. It is also a rush to see the light go on in a student's eyes when they feel the horse soften underneath them and quietly go on the bit. This is so rewarding that I continue to travel crazily around the countryside teaching Centered Riding. But deep inside I keep hearing this little voice "what about me?!"

So I practice my riding in everything I do. This way at least when I do finally get a horse, I am able to ride. In fact, just the other day I was doing a clinic for a public stable and I realized that most of the riders in the clinic did not own their own horse and probably only rode once or twice a week. One of them asked me whether the school horse would remember this stuff even though it was ridden by other people the rest of the week. I replied that it would as long as the student remembered to converse using her newfound techniques.

This question got me to thinking about my own sporadic rid-

*"So I practice my riding in everything I do.
This way at least when I do finally get a horse,
I am able to ride."*

fall into your lap. (I don't notice it much, but lately people keep telling me how much their animals like me. Dogs that always come into the arena to say Hi! When I am around; cats appear when typically they go into hiding when strangers arrive, and horses that all seem to want to come home with me at the end of a clinic.) Anyway, I keep wondering how long I can continue to teach everyone else when I don't have a horse of my own. It seems it has been like this for a long time. I haven't actually owned a horse since 1987. I have had a couple of horses to ride for about 6

ing. I realized that while I probably ride as infrequently as these people do, my riding has improved far beyond the typical expectations of the "once-a-weekers" I was teaching. In fact, just a few weeks before I had to help a student with her canter pirouettes. Now it is not like I get to practice canter pirouettes on horseback every day (I have done thousands on a mini-trampoline over the years). Yet I was able to perform them on this horse and improve his overall performance. "Why?" I asked myself. The answer was pretty clear: because I keep practicing all the movements over

Editor's Note: This article was written in 1997. Wendy has owned horses again since 1999.



and over again in my head and on the ground. And I practice them perfectly, seeing the horse lightly move away from my aids, happy in his work, me sitting perfectly and smiling the whole time. And I understand the foundation of good movement in both horse and rider. If the foundation is sound, then performing the more advanced movements becomes easy.

So this leads me to my students again. I realized that if I can do it, so can they. It is not that I am a particularly talented rider; I was certainly not a natural like some folks and I have had a major injury that got me into all the T.T.E.A.M. and Centered Riding in the first place. I broke my hip socket when a horse flipped over on me. Believe me, that has a very limiting effect on one's riding. Yet through the past 13 years since my accident, I have made major progress without the benefit of owning a horse (or therapeutic riding which might have been a good thing). Physical therapy did not exist for riders back then and I am envious of friends that have had pelvic injuries now when I hear about the wonderful physical rehabilitation they have received. I had to do it on my own. Enough whining.

So I have realized once again the power of practicing without actually riding. I talk about it all the time in my clinics. I explain about the study with the basketball team that improved their free throws without actually shooting a basket or the guy in Vietnam that took several strokes off his golf game and kept himself from going crazy by playing 18 holes of golf while being trapped in a little box for weeks. I also talk about practicing Centered Riding in everything you do from driving the car to washing dishes or dealing with your children. I guess in this case I practice what I preach AND I benefit from the results. That does not mean that I get it right all the time. When I made the mistake of coming home from a clinic on Memorial Day Monday at 7:00 pm on the New Jersey Turnpike, I can honestly state that I was far from "centered". In fact if any of you were at the toll booth at about 10:00 pm that night (at the New York City end) you may have noticed a completely crazed woman in a blue Acura Integra about to jump out of her car and pound on the hood of some cars on her left trying to cut in front of her. You could at least hear her yelling at



the drivers and threatening to ram them. Yes, I admit it was I.

I am often asked what one can do to improve their riding other than just ride. Here are some suggestions: Practice playing at being a horse—that is right—canter around the yard on the way down to the mailbox. This is not just for kids, I can't tell you how many adults have no idea how to canter on foot. And they wonder why they have a problem on the horse? Make sure you can canter on both leads (you may be surprised that you favor the one your horse does!) Use your Centered Riding techniques in other facets of your life like driving the car, carrying your school books, sitting in the doctor's office while waiting for your appointment. You will be amazed to find that you will be less fatigued after a little practice. Spend a little time each day sitting well, such as at the dinner table or in front of your computer. Remember to find your seat bones pointing straight down (you may have to come to the front of the chair as most want to put you too far back), then align your spine, notice your breathing. While you are at it, imagine what it is you would like your horse to do and see him doing it perfectly. You may not be able to perform it that way yet but heck; this is your imaginary experience! Why not go all the way?! When I drive down the road I always listen for good kur music on the CD or radio and make up a ride in my head. What fun playing with canter pirouettes and half-pass! Instead of sitting on a stool or kneeling when you are in low places, do deep knee bends or squats instead. This is a



great way to practice your jumping position and strengthen your quadriceps. While you are down there, notice if you can keep your feet flat on the floor (a good test to see if your ankles have enough flexibility). Slowly come halfway to standing and feel the quads work. Then gently imitate the motion of rising trot in a forward position. (A side benefit to this exercise is the toning of your thigh and buttocks!) Be careful if you have knee problems as this can be a bit hard on those joints and make sure you stick your bottom out as you go down and that your knees are aligned with the middle toe of each foot. (Another place to practice this is doing TTEAM leg exercises.)

Other things you can do are the Alexander technique, *Feldenkrais* and other forms of body awareness exercises such as T'ai Chi, or take up ballroom dancing. I did for several years and it really straightened out an issue I had about rolling to the outside of my right foot and supporting my weight on my left leg. And it was really fun! A friend of mine, Joyce Harman DVM, has spent less time on a horse than I have lately. I recently gave her a lesson and she has improved tremendously since the last lesson, two years ago, because she has been going to a network chiropractor and walking up a steep hill every day after she feeds her horses.

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Notice when you are breathing well, that the diaphragm supports the ribcage from below and the ribs expand outward. Practice walking this type of diaphragm support. You could imagine that you had a tray in your hand. Observe how the torso muscles need to come into use in order to keep the tray level (this will also help tone the internal muscles in your pelvis). Make sure you practice carrying a tray in either hand so that you are balanced on both sides of your body. For that matter, practice mucking your stall the non-habitual way or the opposite way you usually do. You might find that you get frustrated very quickly and want to switch because you are taking so long. Remember that you need to develop both sides of your body if you want the horse to respond equally on both reins.

If you want to put in some real effort, get yourself a mini-tramp and work out on it at walk, trot and canter. Be careful that you take off your spurs before you mount otherwise you may get bucked off! Put the tramp in front of a mirror and watch to see if you are straight in the shoulders and hips. Check to see if you can bear the weight equally on both legs. It is not necessary to do lots of jumping around on the tramp. Keep your feet close to the surface and letting your joints give. At walk, leave your entire foot on the tramp and just give in the joints. This can be a real eye opener in itself. Notice whether you throw your hips from side to side or if there is little sideways movement. Then decrease the sideways movement and let your knees go forward over your toes. (Sideways movement can indicate a number of issues that appear in riding including problems sitting the canter.)

One last suggestion I would like to make is meditation. Now I know this sounds a little bit “eastern” but let me explain. I have been meditating for 12 years and I have experienced profound changes in my body as a result. So if you can't connect to the concept for its “peace and calmness” think of it as a great way to improve your seat for riding. Here's how. The position of sitting with the spine aligned and legs crossed (lotus position is definitely not necessary) helps strengthen the torso perfectly for riding. At first I used to need a wall to rest against and pillows behind my back. Now I can sit for an hour without any assistance because I have sufficiently strengthened the muscles in my abdomen and back while releasing the tension around my hip joints. The result of this release is greater freedom of movement in my hips so that I can sit the trot more fluidly.

Before you know it you will be cantering to the bus waiting for the kids and practicing your side pass heading out to the garbage can, tucking your seat for the perfect slide stop into the traffic light or gently half-halting as you apply the brakes coming into a curve in the road. You will notice that you breathe when you get another one of those harassing solicitation phone calls instead of slamming the phone on the guy's ear. Perhaps you will find yourself centering as you wait in line at the grocery store instead of wanting to knock everyone down to get to the check-out. Remember, the more senses you involve, smell, hearing, etc. the more powerful visualizations become. Now if I can just figure out how to visualize melting off 20 lbs. as I travel..... ah well, I guess that comes with practice.



The Feldenkrais Method® for Effortless Riding

Introduction and Overview

How many times have you gotten on your horse and thought, “I am so stiff!” Or, maybe you have noticed your horse is stiff, has trouble bending, turning one direction or taking a particular canter lead. You may have already recognized that you could be the cause of the problem, but, what do you do about it? Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a way to solve these problems without hours of stretching, or years and years of riding? There is. The Feldenkrais Method offers riders a unique way to solve riding problems through pain-free, gentle, small movements that teach you how to move in new ways, in just minutes.

How can The FELDENKRAIS METHOD work so quickly?

Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, the creator of the *Method*, was a PhD Engineer working in France for Madame Curie just prior to World War II. After suffering a severe knee injury he rehabilitated himself by studying auto-suggestion, psychology, human development and the human skeleton, the framework of our body. For over 40 years Dr. Feldenkrais refined his work, and taught his Method to others. Dr. Feldenkrais recognized several key factors, which serve as the basis of The *Feldenkrais Method* (1.) You cannot think a thought without a movement, (2.) We act in accordance to our own self-image, and (3.) We can change our self-image, and therefore our human potential, with conscious awareness through movement.

Science has proven that every thought provokes a chemical reaction in the brain. Therefore, on a molecular level, you cannot think a thought without a movement. This is also true on a practical level. Every time you think of taking an action, say getting out of your chair, your entire nervous system has organized or gotten ready for you to stand up, before you ever acted upon your desire to stand. Every time you ask your horse to turn, the thought of turning has caused a response in your body that has organized your body to ask the horse to turn. A sensitive horse hears the organization or the ‘getting ready’ part from your body before you ever consciously ‘act’ on the thought. That is why with some horses you have to be extremely careful of your thoughts so they don't act on them, like jumping too soon, or stopping at a fence because you held your breath!

That we act in accordance with our own self-image is expressed daily in our riding. If we say that we are stiff, or we can't jump that high, or our horse doesn't like crossing water, then that is what we project to our horse and how our horse will respond. This is also why horses are used in equine-facilitated psychotherapy with children. The horses ‘hear’ what the children are saying to themselves and help demonstrate what is truly going on with the kids. It is as if our limiting belief system is transmitted to the horse, and the horse expresses it like a

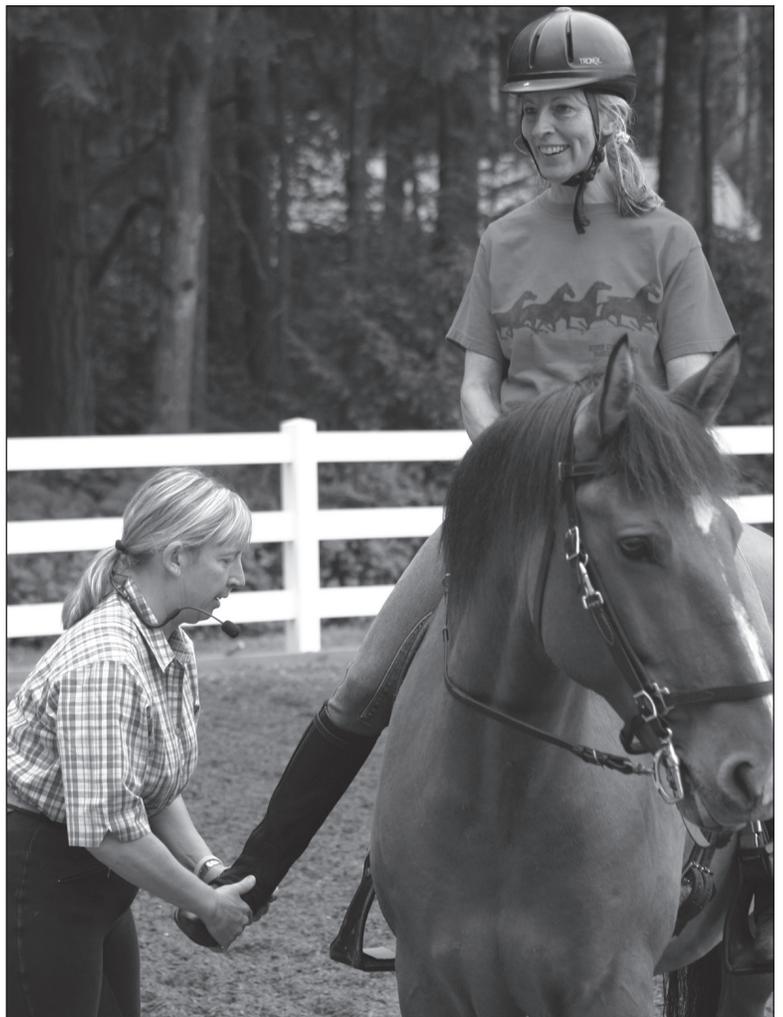


photo by Mary O'Brien

mirror. However, we can change our self-image through learning new possibilities of movement. Not only does this improve our physical potential, it also changes our self-image, and therefore allows our horse to perform new and different movements. The horse suddenly becomes confident because the rider is acting in a new and positive way.





An Awareness Through Movement lesson performed in the saddle.

AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT®

As Dr. Feldenkrais refined his work he divided it into two intimately related parts; *Awareness Through Movement* and *Functional Integration*®. The easiest way to understand the difference is to think in terms of a group lesson vs. a private riding lesson. Dr. Feldenkrais calculated that given the number of bones in the human skeleton there were approximately 5000 different combinations of movements we could make with the human skeleton. He surmised that after high-school most people only used about 800 combinations of movements. Add in aging, injury and repetitive types of work, most people limit their way of moving to well less than 800 combinations. Dr. Feldenkrais developed hundreds of different lessons during his lifetime as a means to learn and rediscover our potential for movement. These lessons can be taught as either Awareness Through Movement or Functional Integration lessons.

Awareness Through Movement lessons can be done at home using audio-recorded lessons, or in a group with a *Feldenkrais Practitioner* guiding the lesson (like a group riding lesson). *Functional Integration* is a one-on-one session with a *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner* (like a private riding lesson). Each lesson is designed to teach the student a new way of organizing themselves. Some lessons follow a theme while others stand alone. Some lessons are easier, and others require some experience with the *Method*. However, all lessons can be modified for any student if the basic principles of *Awareness Through Movement* are followed. Dr. Feldenkrais argued that his work was

not to be called exercise or be associated with exercise. He saw his *Method* as a system of education using ourselves as the object of study.

Dr. Feldenkrais saw his work as unique and different from any other type of physical exercise. This is because he was not trying to get the student to stretch, strengthen or become more supple through mere physical acts. Instead, he was concerned with the students' attention to their action, regardless of the amount. When a student is unable to do the movement requested she is encouraged to visualize the movement as clearly as possible. Lessons are modified to the ability of the student instead of trying to make the student adhere to some imposed image of the movement. This is why the *Awareness Through Movement* lessons are only available in audio form. Dr. Feldenkrais did not want people to try to emulate someone else's movement. Rather he wanted them to discover what they were doing, could do and could conceive of doing for themselves. What is so powerful about the *Method* is that huge changes can occur in only one lesson by making very small, slow, non-habitual movements during the lesson. That is because the primary focus is about awareness, not movement.

Lessons are constructed in such a way that a constraint sets up the avenue for learning. A constraint is some type of restriction. Often lessons are done on the floor. However, there are chair and standing lessons. The floor, chair or wall serves as the constraint for the lesson in each case. Unlike exercise, there is no 'goal' or ideal movement presented ahead of time. Nor are we told at the beginning what the desired outcome is supposed to be. This is intentional. With a goal, students will jump to the end without learning a new way to move. Therefore, not telling you what the lesson is about is intentional. This keeps you curious and in the moment so that you learn new pathways of thought and movement. Many people find this part frustrating because they want to know what they are trying to accomplish. But that is exactly the point of not telling you. The idea is to remain in the process; otherwise you will simply use your old tried and true method without learning something new. By exploring the possibilities, and only do what is pleasurable and comfortable during the lesson, you discover much more about yourself. Your nervous system is given time to notice these non-habitual movements (movements we wouldn't ordinarily do) without the sense of failure or performance anxiety. Therefore, each student can learn at their own pace, and explore possibilities as deeply as they desire within any given lesson.

The Basic Principles of Any AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT Lesson

The tenets Dr. Feldenkrais put forth can be applied to learn-



ing anything. They are the basis for Linda Tellington-Jones TTEAM (Tellington-Jones Equine Awareness Method), which Linda developed after taking the *Feldenkrais* Practitioner training with Dr. Feldenkrais in the late 70's.

These principles are:

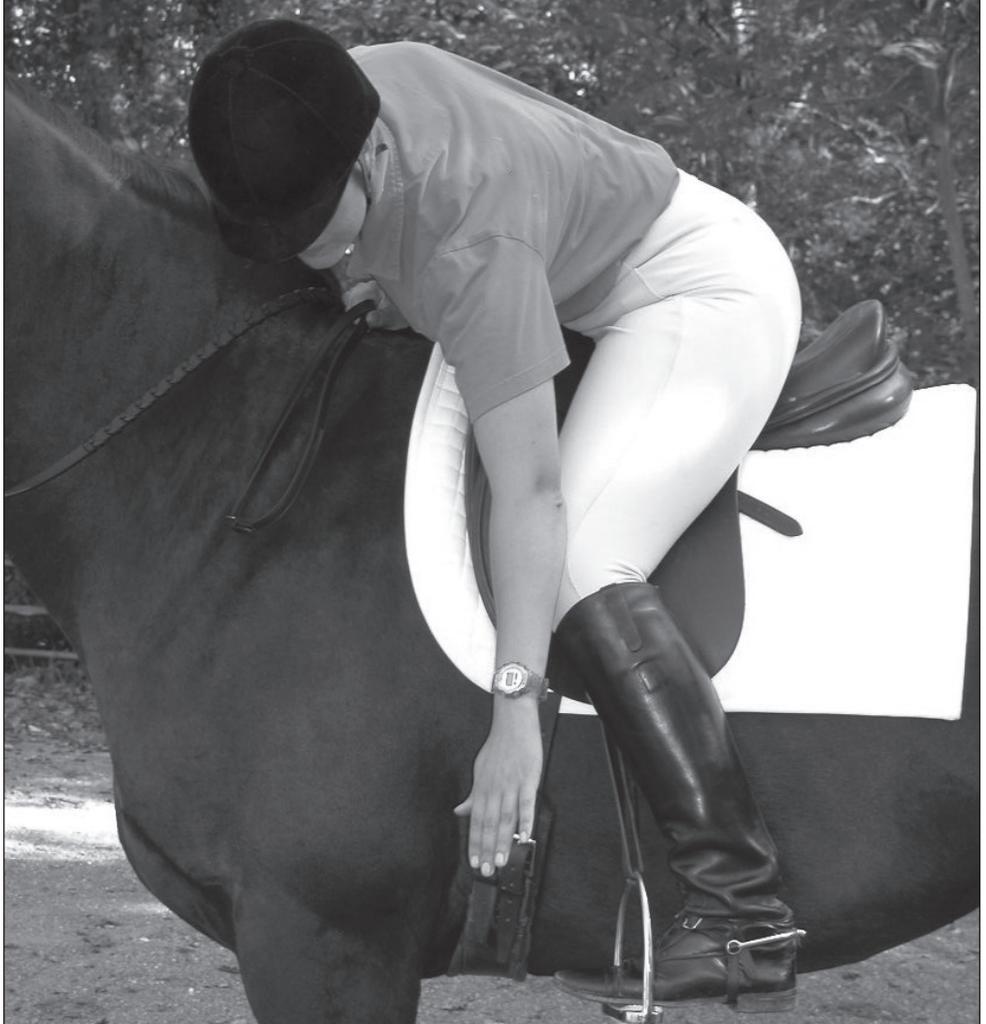
Go slowly – Fast movements are discouraged because it takes more conscious awareness to move slowly. This also gives your brain a chance to pay attention to how you are doing the movement.

Do less – Our nervous system senses change as a ratio not as an imperial measure. In other words, the less we do the more sensitive the nervous system becomes to what is happening. This is also true when we ride. Most people get in trouble with the horse when they try to do more, like over-steering in snow. In *Awareness Through Movement* the less you do the more sensitive you will become to the changes and possibilities that exist. Another reason for doing less is that you want to develop fine motor control for riding. Doing gross large movements will not produce an elegant rider!

If it hurts-stop! – This is a key principle in the *Feldenkrais Method*. The idea of no pain, no gain doesn't work here. Pain signals to the brain that something is wrong. Pain inhibits learning. The brain gets distracted from the learning and concentrates on survival instead. In *Awareness Through Movement* students are looking for new possibilities, so if it hurts, stop, go more slowly, and do less in order to learn a new way to do something.

Rest between movements - A momentary pause between each movement allows the brain to see each movement as unique. Resting also allows the brain to assimilate the information gathered from the previous movement. Rest between a series of movements give the brain a moment to integrate the movement into a larger construct, a larger picture, much like sleeping on something overnight and having it makes sense in the morning.

Work within your comfort, only do what is enjoyable - If you go to your limit all you learn are your limitations and thus reinforce them. By moving within a comfortable range or perhaps even less, you learn how to go towards and return from a movement. In this way you can become aware of how you are doing the movement and what limits you from going further easily. If the movement is easy, of course you can go as far as you like.



Looking for the path of least effort.

Here's a taste of a FELDENKRAIS AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT® Lesson:

Sitting in your chair, turn to look at something behind you on your right. Only do what is easy. Mark the spot on the wall for how far around you can see to begin with.

Now take only your eyes to the right 3 times. Leave your nose straight ahead. Go slowly, notice if your eyes jump or pan like a video camera as you move your eyes. Do not force anything. Go slowly!

Next leave your eyes straight ahead (look at a picture on the wall or a tree) and take your nose (with your head) to the right 3 times. Going slowly, do not force the movement. Only do what is easy.

Now look to your right as you did in the first step. How much further can you look?

By taking the time to differentiate your eyes from your head, and your head from your eyes, you discover that you can look much further with less effort. That's *Feldenkrais*! Imagine how that will help you look for your turns on a hunter course, or a 10 meter circle in the dressage arena, and perhaps more importantly, how this will make it easier for your horse to do what you want. Spring is a perfect time for learning new things. For more information about the *Feldenkrais Method* you can go to www.feldenkrais.com or go to www.murdochmethod.com.



Improving Your Weight Aids

Learn to use the Pelvic Clock

Many riders struggle to apply their weight aids correctly. While your dressage instructor may clearly tell you where to have your weight for a variety of movements including canter departs, shoulder-in, haunches-in and half-pass, your attempts may not yield the results that you are looking for.

1.



The answer to this problem may be caused by several factors:

1. You are not sitting straight to begin with.
2. The timing of your weight aids is out of sync with the horse.
3. You are overdoing the application of your weight aids causing adverse effects.
4. You are not putting your weight where it is actually going.
5. You have no idea how to apply a weight aid in the first place.

While I could go into a long discussion about the whys and wherefores, I would rather give you one exercise you can do to help you apply weight aids more correctly. This exercise, commonly referred to as the “Pelvic Clock,” is an adaptation of a *Feldenkrais Method® Awareness Through Movement®* Lesson. In its basic form this lesson gives you more mobility in your pelvis. Greater mobility in all directions allows you to find a balanced central position. From here you will be able to make small, accurate movements in your pelvis in order to apply accurate weight aids.

As a teaching tool, the Pelvic Clock can be used to help the rider find a more balanced seat once she has done this lesson off the horse. If the rider is sitting too much to one side while she is riding, I can help her sit balanced in the saddle by asking her to move her pelvis toward a particular hour on the clock that will counter this position, resulting in a more level, balanced seat. In this way I can coach the rider into a central position and from there toward subtle weight shifts so that her aids are more effective.

What you will need to do this lesson

For this lesson you will want to sit on a flat, level surface. The best height is such that your thigh and lower leg are at a 90

degree angle behind the knee. If you are sitting on a standard chair, you will need to come to the front edge of the chair. Your feet need to be flat on the floor. If you can, take your shoes off. For the rest periods it would be good if you could lean against the back of the chair or a wall if you are sitting on a bench. Alternatively, you could lie on the floor during the rest periods.

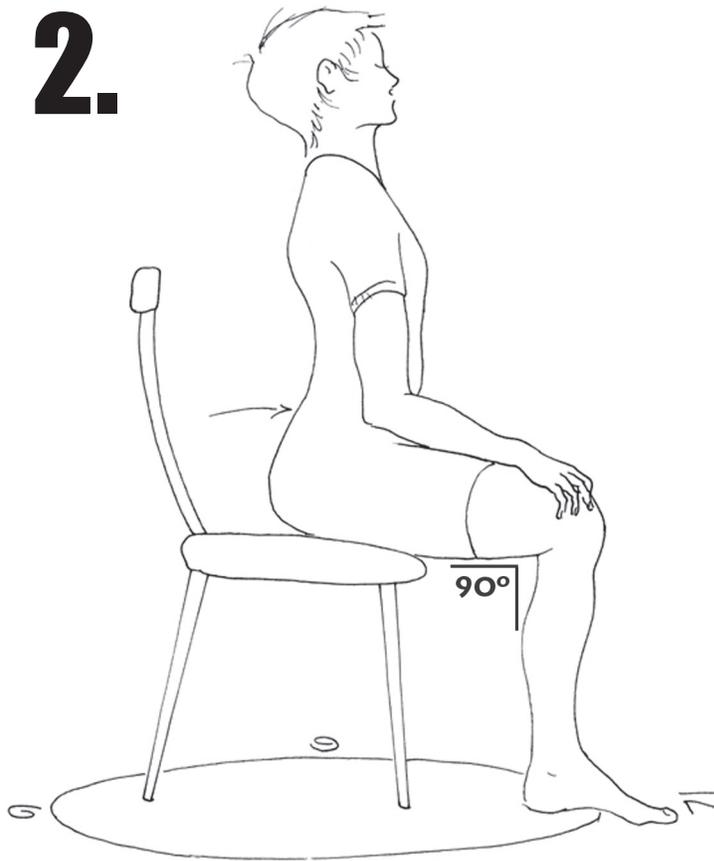
Pelvic Clock

To begin, come to a sitting position at the front of your chair with your feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes and feel your seat bones in contact with the chair. Notice if your two seat bones are making equal contact or if one is heavier than the other. Also notice if you are sitting on the same part of each seat bone.

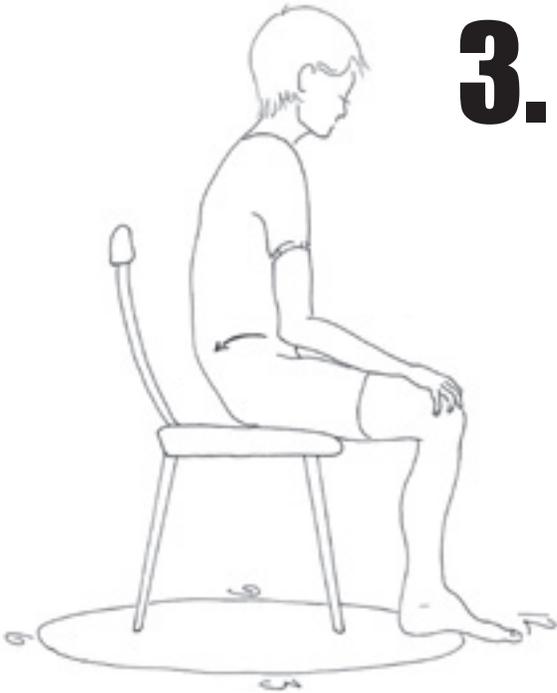
Now imagine that you are sitting on the face of a clock (Illustration 1). The clock is on the surface you are sitting upon or on the floor below you. The hour of six o'clock is behind you and 12 is in front of you. 3 o'clock is to your right and 9 o'clock is to your left. (Digital clocks won't work here!)



2.



3.



4.



5.



Slowly begin to move your pelvis so that you advance the top of your pelvis toward 12 o'clock (Illustration 2). This means that you would hollow your back slightly as you move the top of your pelvis forward. Do this small movement many times. Notice what happens to your weight on your seat bones as you do this. Notice what happens to your breathing, your hip joints and your spine. Rest.

Come to sitting again. This time move the top of your pelvis back toward 6 o'clock (Illustration 3). That means your back will round slightly. Notice what other parts of you move as you take your pelvis towards 6. Do your feet tend to want to leave the floor? Do this movement many times to feel what happens with your chest, head and feet. Rest.

Come to sitting again. Tip your pelvis toward 3 o'clock (to the right) either by lifting the left seat bone or pushing down slightly with the right seat bone. Repeat this movement several times. Do your heels want to lift off the floor? Go slowly. How do you move your pelvis toward 3? Which leg/foot helps you move toward 3? What does your back do as you go toward 3 o'clock? Do you tilt, lean or collapse your rib cage as you move over toward 3? Rest.

Repeat only now go toward 9 o'clock (Illustration 5). Do you go toward 9 differently than 3? Which direction is easier? Rest.

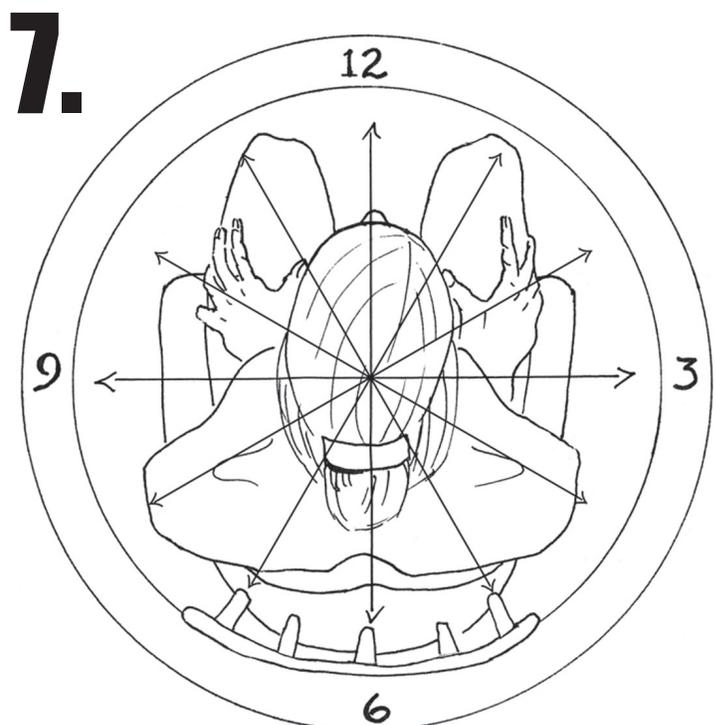
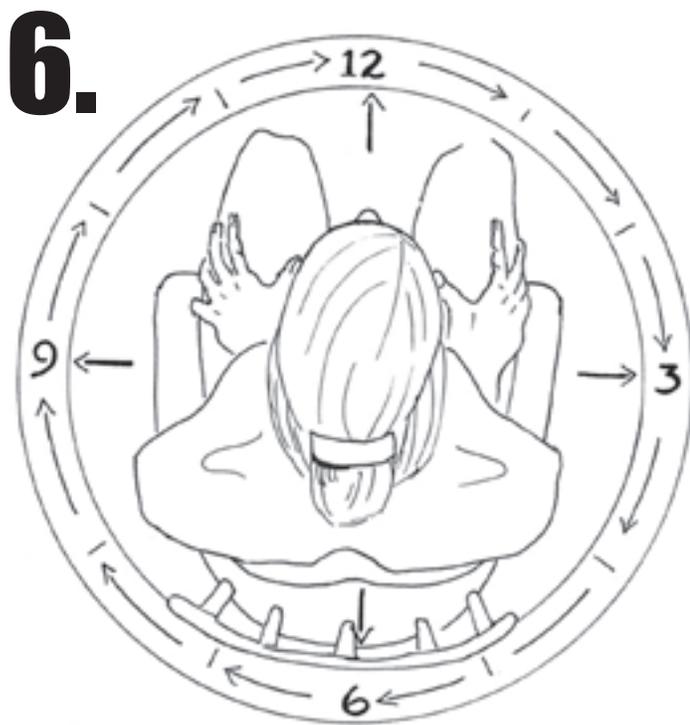
Come to sitting again. Move your pelvis toward 12 o'clock. Then continue around the outside of the clock toward 1 o'clock. Continue on to 2 then 3, back to 2, 1 and 12. Repeat this quar-

ter of the clock several times. Notice which hours are easy and which hours are not so easy. What is the quality of the arc like as you go from 12 to 3 and back? Is it jerky, smooth, flat or curved? Rest for a moment, then continue moving from 12 through 3 to 6 o'clock. After you have done this half of the clock many times slowly and easily, sit again in the middle. Notice the difference between the two sides of your pelvis. Rest.

Come to sitting again and repeat moving around the clock, this time going from 12 through 9 to 6. In other words, you are doing the other half of the clock moving counterclockwise, then from 6 clockwise back to 12. Repeat this many times, slowly and easily. Notice which hours are difficult to find and which ones are easy. Feel the difference in the two sides of your pelvis. How much of you is involved with this movement? Rest.

Come to sitting and move hour by hour around the outside of the clock in a clockwise direction. (Illustration 6). How smooth can you make the circle? What happens in your hip joints, rib cage and head? Then go counterclockwise around the clock. How is this different? Rest.

Come to sitting and now instead of going around the clock begin to go across the clock. Start with moving from 6 to 12. Notice if this is easier now. Next move between 3 and 9. This will also be familiar as you have already done this diameter of the clock. Then beginning with 1 o'clock go through the hours diagonally (Illustration 7) 1 to 7, 2 to 8, 3 to 9, 4 to 10, 5 to 11 and 6 to 12. Which diagonals were easy? Which diagonals are hard? Rest.



Finally come to sitting again. This time go around the clock and then across the clock. As you do this, see if you can determine the exact middle of the clock, where the hands would attach at the center. This would be a balanced central position on the saddle. Notice if what you now consider the middle is in a different place on your seat bones than when you started.

If you adhered to the basic guidelines for the lesson, you may have noticed that it got easier as you went along. You may also have discovered why in your riding, you have only been able to do something in one direction but not the other. If there were hours that were really easy, you might find that you get trapped there when riding preventing you from sitting evenly. If there were hours on the clock that were elusive or nonexistent, you may not have been able to shift your weight effectively in certain directions. Once you have learned how to do the Pelvic Clock on a chair, you can take this experience to the saddle and

repeat the lesson. Make the clock much smaller when in the saddle (at the walk on a quiet horse) and notice what happens to your horse's balance when you move toward the different hours. At first you may find that you have similar difficulties with a particular area on the clock. Or you might find that in the saddle the "sticky" spots have shifted to a different hour. See if you can determine when the clock is even and level in the saddle. Then when you want to make a weight shift, think of making a barely perceptible movement toward the hour you need for the desired placement of your weight.

Remember that good riding requires accurate riding. Grossly overemphasized weight aids will only cause the horse to tense and stiffen in order to counterbalance underneath you. The more aware you are of where the middle is, the more accurate your weight aids will be.

Basic guidelines for doing FELDENKRAIS AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT lessons

The purpose of this or any *Feldenkrais Method* lesson is to help you develop awareness through movement. In other words, it is about bringing your conscious attention to how you move and what is happening in your entire self as you do the lessons. Therefore, in doing this lesson it is very important to observe the following guidelines.

- If it hurts, do less. If you experience any pain while attempting to do the suggested movements, make your movements smaller. Forcing will only show you your limitations rather than your potential. If you think you are already making small movements, see if you can make them half that size. Challenge yourself to do just the hint of the movement. Dressage requires minute adjustments to position within the movement of the horse. If your movements are abrupt, rough and harsh, it could interrupt the horse rather than harmonize with him. Making small movements requires the fine motor control necessary to be a good dressage rider.

- If you get tired during the lesson, stop and rest. There are many pauses in the lesson. The idea is to give your nervous system a chance to process the information you are discovering. If you don't stop and rest when you are tired and/or at the prescribed rest stops, you will not allow your brain to integrate new information. Unlike a computer, our brain learns when it is resting or thinking about other things. This goes along with the concept of "sleeping on it" to figure something out. The rests are momentary pauses to give your nervous system a chance to process the information.

- While you may find some of the movements similar, *Feldenkrais* lessons are unlike aerobics, yoga or any other type of physical exercise. The lessons are designed to help you understand how to organize yourself easily and efficiently. Hopefully you will discover areas of yourself that have been inactivate or tight, preventing you from moving in a certain way. You would then be able to apply this new awareness to your riding or any

other activities you do such as yoga or Pilates. In other words, the *Feldenkrais* lessons will allow you to access a greater potential for movement in all that you do.

- Do not force the movements. Often we are told "no pain, no gain." With *Feldenkrais Method* lessons the opposite is true. Forcing, trying hard, making big fast movements will only inhibit the learning you will gain from the lesson. This in itself can be hard for many people to grasp. If you find yourself struggling at your maximum range of motion, then consider doing 10% of what you think you can do.

- Visualize the movements instead of actually doing them. If you find that even the smallest movements are painful, or that you are unable to do certain movements, simply visualize them. Why does visualization work? You cannot think a thought without a movement. Therefore, by visualizing you will be making imperceptible movements. When you return to doing the movement, you might be surprised to find that is much easier it is.

- You can't make a mistake. Dressage riders often are so concerned with "getting it right" that they will sacrifice everything to be "right." In this lesson there are no "wrong" movements. The important thing is to observe what you do so that you have a choice. Later, you can apply the lesson to finding a balanced position in the saddle. However, if you keep thinking about how this applies to riding while doing the lesson, you will miss some important information about yourself. Do not inhibit certain movements because you can't see how it might apply to your riding at the moment. Experiment with different possibilities. Afterward, you can decide which movements you choose to use while riding.

- Take the time to explore the movements. Going slowly is important so that you can observe the changes that occur. If you think you are already going slow, try going half again as slow. The small movements required for dressage require fine motor control. By going slowly in the lesson, you will discover how to make minute changes in position.



Shim Your Stirrups

What Happens When You Twist a Flat Plane

A couple of years ago a foxhunter and student of mine, Bruce Gerrish, returned from a skiing trip to Vail, Colo. While there, his ski boots were balanced for his leg/foot alignment by leveling the foot bed of his boots. Upon his return Bruce realized that this might also be true for his foot in the stirrup. He got some wedge material and duct-taped it to one side of his stirrups. When he came for his next lesson, he was riding much better because he could align his leg and foot on the stirrups, giving him a solid base of support.

After seeing this, I realized that Bruce was onto something. So I carried around duct tape and cardboard to my clinics. I “shimmed” several students and they rode much better because they could find a solid base of support on the stirrup. Then, of course, like so many things, my attention turned to other ideas and I forgot about this concept. That is until this past summer.

In June I went to Montana to give a clinic. There I met Pete Gorrell. He has been making Western saddles longer than I have been alive. Pete has certainly thought a lot about making saddles over the years. He has also done a lot of skiing. He recognized the similarity between the ski boot and the stirrup.

One of the Western students at this Montana clinic was having difficulty with her leg and foot position. Pete helped out by shimming her stirrup so she had a level solid place for her foot. It was then I remembered what Bruce had shown me several years before. I had not put Bruce’s idea together with the Western saddles until Pete pointed it out. In an English saddle you are basically dealing with the rider’s leg/foot alignment issues. With Western saddles the stirrup leather construction is a major cause of the alignment problems riders experience. Even if your Western saddle has rolled stirrup leathers, you may still need to shim your stirrups to achieve a level base of support. This may be for two reasons: your conformation and the issue with the Western stirrup leather.

Western saddles—twisting a flat plane

There are two basic issues with the fenders/stirrup leathers in Western saddles. One is that if the leathers aren’t rolled, the stirrups will want to hang parallel to the horse rather than perpendicular. This means that the rider will have to fight with the stirrup. This can cause ankle and foot pain.

One solution to this problem is to wet the fenders, twist them and put a broomstick through them until they dry. That way the leather will want to maintain the twist, causing the stirrup to hang more perpendicular to the horse’s side.

The other solution is to permanently twist, or roll the stirrup leather to eliminate this problem. This is more common in Western ranch-type saddles than other Western saddles. While this does alleviate the problem of the stirrup tending to lie parallel to the horse’s sides, it does not address the issue of twisting a flat plane.

In basic geometry when you twist a flat plane that has straight edges, the edge winds up at an angle due to the effect of the twist. Look at Photo 1; this is a wide flat plane of material used to simulate what happens to the stirrup leather. Notice that the bottom edge is basically parallel to the ground. In Photo 2, I have twisted the flat plane. Observe how the bottom edge is no longer parallel to the ground. There is an incline from right to left with the outside edge farther away from the ground than the edge closest to the horse.

This angling caused by twisting a flat plane is the same thing that happens to the fender/stirrup leather in a Western saddle. The width of the leather in a Western saddle is significantly greater than an English stirrup leather. While this situation is also true when twisting an English leather, there is much less overall angle because the English leather is so much narrower than in a fender/stirrup leather.

Next, look at Photo 3. Here is a Western stirrup that is hanging from the saddle. I have twisted the leather to nearly a perpendicular position. Look at the angle of the stirrup. Notice that the outside edge of the footrest is higher than the inside edge. Look back at Photo 2 and see that the twisted plane has a similar angle as the footrest of the stirrup in Photo 3.

When the rider’s foot is resting on the stirrup, Photo 4, the stirrup is still angled as in Photo 3. Therefore, the rider will



come in contact with the outside of the foot on the footrest first. Either the rider will cock her ankle to try to get an even contact along the width of the foot (from the ball of the big toe to the pinky toe), or she will have all her weight resting only on the outside edge of her foot. This can cause general discomfort in the foot and/or ankle and decrease the rider's sense of security in the saddle.

To correct this situation, take material that will be fairly firm; leather is good if you are handy with a knife. Cut a wedge that will fill in the angle so that the footrest is level. In Photo 5 I have simply used cardboard and duct tape as a temporary solution to the problem. I have taped the cardboard to the inside branch of the stirrup. I don't have the footrest quite level from left to right but it is an improvement. You can play around with how much material you need and what feels good to you. It is important to thin the material as you approach the middle of the footrest so that you don't have a thick edge where the shim meets the stirrup under your foot.

With the rider's foot once again in the stirrup, there is a more level place to rest. There is even contact across the entire ball of the foot without having to cock the foot down on the inside. Now the rider will be able to have a better base of support without struggling against the stirrup.

The alignment of the knee and foot

Good alignment of your knee to your foot is essential to minimize stress on the knee while riding. If your foot tends to roll in or out, due either to your own conformation or your saddle, it may put undue stress on your joints and make you feel unstable in the saddle.

It is generally accepted that the least stressful alignment for the knee is when it lines up over the 2nd toe. The 2nd toe is considered the "main ray." This is the toe the other toes move toward or away from. In general, when the knee lines up over the second toe, the knee is balanced. The ligaments around the knee are under the least amount of tension in all directions. Of course, as individuals you may find that this position is somewhat stressful when you are standing on the ground. This will be based on your individual way of moving and conformation. It will also be influenced by how your foot is in contact with the ground. Experiment with the following idea and see if making small changes can give you a more solid feeling in the saddle.



Plumb line

To determine if your knee lines up over your 2nd toe, take a piece of string and hang a small weight from it. A nut for a bolt works quite well. This will create a plumb line. You might need someone to help you with this, as looking down may influence the alignment of your knee with your foot.

At home, take off your shoes. Standing up straight, have someone hold the plumb line so the nut hangs down from the center of your kneecap. Notice what toe the nut hangs over. Check both knees and see if they line up the same. This will give you some idea of how you line up in general. If the center of your kneecap already lines up over your middle toe, then you won't need to go through the rest of this article unless you simply want to experiment to find out how not having this alignment affects you.

Shimming your feet

Get some cardboard and cut it into 1" wide strips about 2" long. Begin shimming your feet by placing pieces of cardboard under either the inside or outside edge of your foot (big toe side or pinky toe side). Notice how the shim affects the plumb line. As you shim, the plumb (nut) will either line up closer to your middle toe or farther away toward your big toe or pinky toe.

If you are not sure of the effect, remove the cardboard and feel the difference, like you would in a *Feldenkrais* lesson. Add as many pieces of cardboard as you want. You might find that one piece is good and two is better. Always add the cardboard to the same side; otherwise, you are just re-creating the same situation as without cardboard. Experiment with three pieces and see if that is better or worse. As you experiment, think of the "Goldilocks Principle": too little, too much, just right. You are looking for just right.

Do one foot at a time. You might find that your two feet are quite different. One foot might want the cardboard on the inside while the other wants it on the outside or not at all. Because this is a very individual thing, you are best to simply experiment with going by what feels best. Then remove everything and see how this differs from having the cardboard under your feet. Place the cardboard under your feet again and see if it really does feel better. Determine the amount of cardboard that is best for each foot.



Shimming your stirrups

Take your pieces of cardboard (make sure you mark which is your right foot and which is your left foot) over to your saddle. Duct-tape the cardboard pieces to your stirrups. Place them properly to the inside or outside branch of your stirrups depending on where you had them when you were standing on the ground. If you have already leveled your Western stirrups, you might find that you have a lot of material on the stirrup. Once you have determined what is best for you, you can come up with a more permanent solution. Mount and ride your horse as usual. Notice if you are more able to feel a solid contact to your stirrups. Do you have a more solid feeling underneath your feet?

Dismount and remove the duct tape and leveling cardboard. Remount and ride again. How does it feel now? Do you feel like your feet are on the floor? Is your “floor” unlevel? What is different in your sensations from when you had the cardboard taped to your stirrups? Put the cardboard back on and see what it feels like again. If you want, you can experiment with taping the cardboard to the opposite side of the stirrup to see how this feels and what it does to your sense of the ground. I bet you won't ride long with it there.

Remember with all of this, what we are looking for is a sense of solid connection to your stirrups through your legs and feet. In order to have a solid connection, you need a surface that gives you good even contact, hence leveling the Western stirrups. In addition, we are taking your own conformation into account by shimming your English stirrups or adding a little more to your Western stirrups.

In the process of shimming we are not trying to change the front to back angle of the stirrup. We are only working on the side-to-side balance. There are a lot of English stirrups and stirrup inserts that attempt to adjust the front to back angle of the stirrups. I generally remove all of that stuff and tell people to get rid of any flexible or angled stirrups. These stirrups usually cause greater instability. Many people have gotten the jointed English stirrups because their knees hurt. There are other ways to resolve the knee pain without resorting to expensive stirrups that simply avoid the issue. Granted, my students who like to go out for long rides will generally put them back on, but in lessons I always like to see the plain Fillis English stirrups.

Shimming your stirrup is not something you will have to do over and over again. After you work out what is comfortable, you will find that you won't even notice that the shims are there. You will have a better sense of solid stability, contact to the stirrup and security. If you take the time now to shim your stirrups you will find that all of your rides will be more enjoyable.



Buy ready made stirrup shims! Visit murdochmethod.com/shop for details.



How to Get Your Heels Down

If you have ever taken riding lessons I am sure you have been told at some point to put your heels down. In some riding programs that seems to be the only thing they focus on.

As a kid growing up riding hunt seat it was quite common to hear “Get your heels down! Sit up! Heels down!” I had one friend who would spend hours hanging her heels off the stairs stretching the back of her leg so that she could sink her heels extremely deep. In fact she could drop her heel about three inches below the stirrup! More commonly however, people push their entire leg forward in front of them instead of getting the heel to sink down.

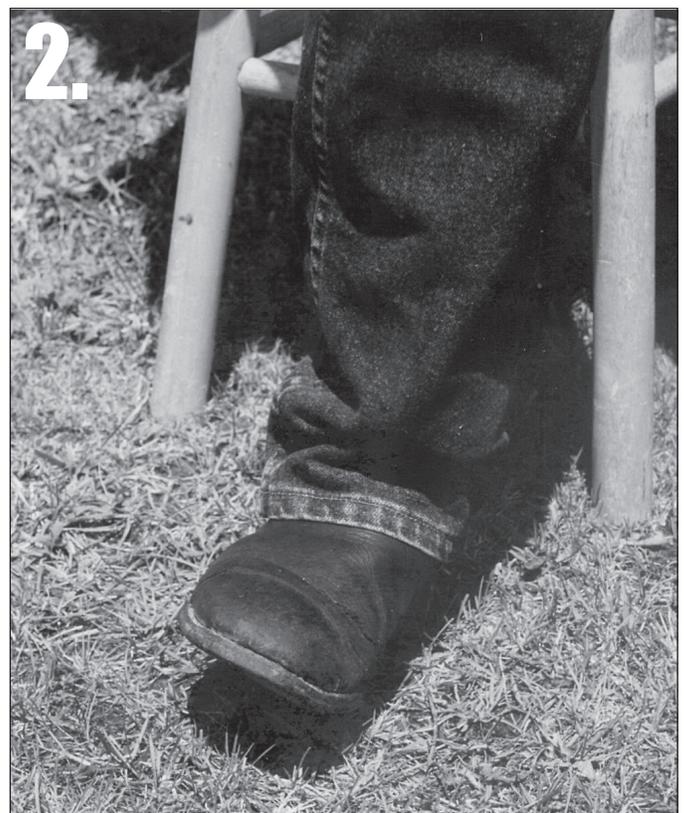
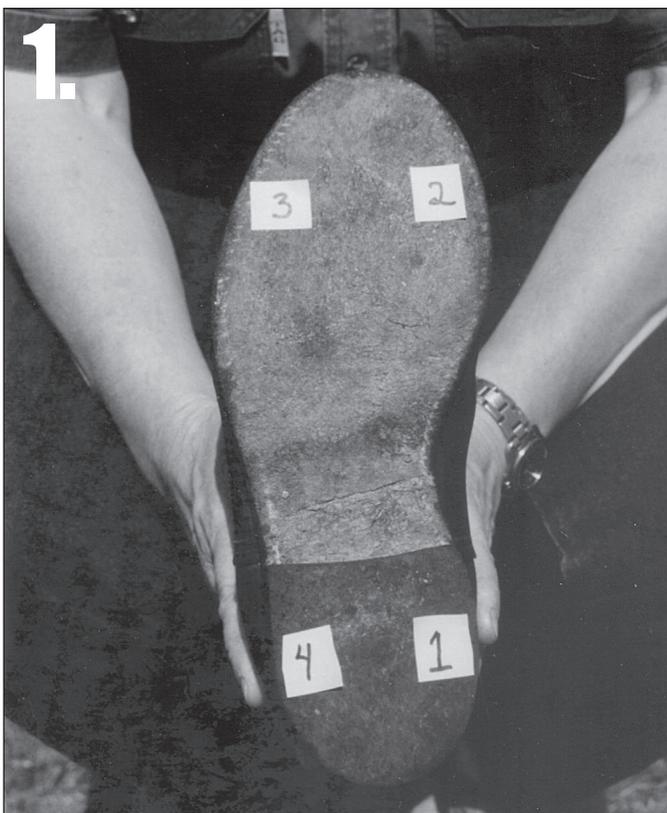
Pushing the leg forward in an attempt to get the heels down creates an entirely different result. The leg is no longer in alignment with the body. Instead of the heel deepening, the foot and stirrup have moved but the heel is still not below the plane of the stirrup. As a result the rider’s seat is pushed to the back and up out of the saddle thereby making their seat less deep. Typically the ankle is rigid because there is so much pressure on the foot. Sometimes the rider’s feet will go numb from the amount of pressure they are placing on the stirrup in an attempt to get their heels down.

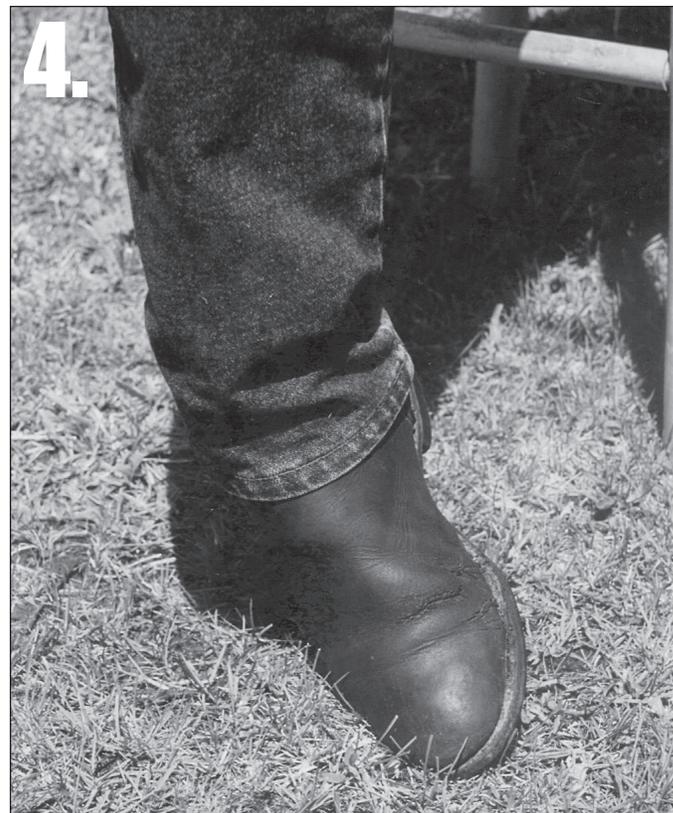
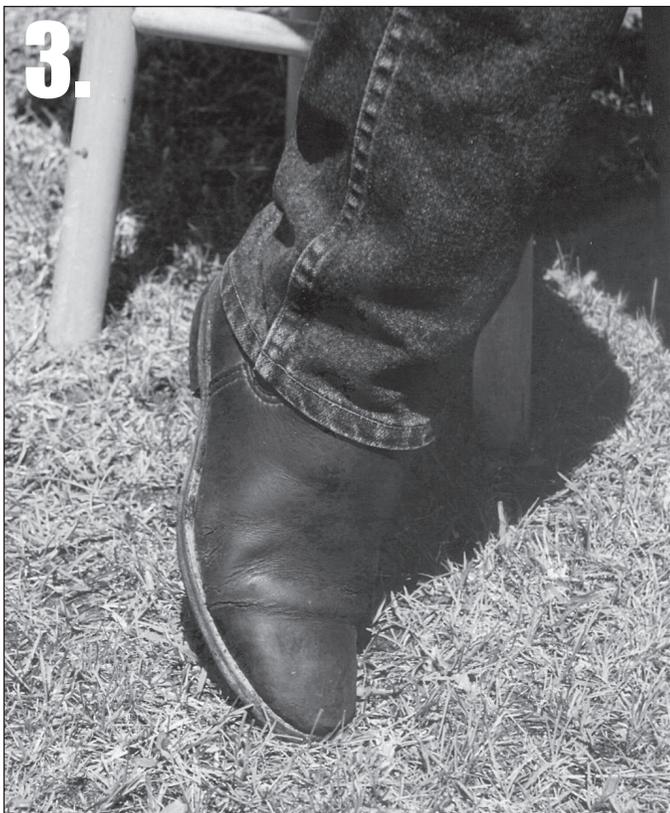
Why heels down?

Riding is one of the few athletic activities that dictates heels down. Most other sports require that you be up on your toes for quick bursts of speed and reaction time. Women who work in high heels have a lot of difficulty with heels down because of the position of the foot in their high-heeled shoes. It is not uncommon for the tendons to shorten from these other activities making “heels down” even harder when riding.

So what is the function of “heels down”? The simplest way to think of it is that the ankles act like the shock absorbers on your car. When the heels sink in rhythm to the horse’s movement the rider remains stable in relation to the horse. But if the rider’s ankle is not supple then the heel cannot sink and the horse’s movement jars you. There is a greater likelihood of becoming separated from your horse with our heels up.

For good shock absorption all the joints in the leg need to be able to function fluidly in concert with each other. Excessively





deep heels can actually block the action of the hip joint especially when jumping. When the heel is pushed too deep the hip cannot open sufficiently causing a downward pressure on the horse. This can impair the horse's ability to bascule (round) over the fence.

If the heel is above the plane of the stirrup the rider is likely to be pitched forward as the horse moves. There is little to no shock absorption in the leg joints. The rider will often go into a fetal position trying to grip with their knees to stay on. Perhaps the answer to "heels down" lies somewhere in between excessively deep heels and heels that are above the plane of the stirrups.

If you look in the ASHA Rule book under Hunt Seat Equitation you will find a drawing of the rider in correct position. This illustration shows a rider sitting on a horse with a level foot. According to William Steinkraus, gold medal Olympic show jumping rider, in *Reflections on Riding and Jumping*, "the heel (is) slightly lower than the toe, with nothing forced". "When the heel is not excessively deep, the calf itself will be elastic and clinging. Leveling the foot more makes it even softer for the horses that try to reject the leg." Clearly Steinkraus is not advocating the excessively deep heel currently seen today but rather a more moderate approach.

If you consider that the rider's ankle is equivalent to the horse's hock joint, jamming this joint by applying excessive downward pressure is not a good idea. The bottom line is that the ankle needs to remain moveable so that the rider can absorb the horse's movement in all the leg joints. Any excess in the

heel, too high or too low, results in a loss of absorbing spring. In addition, there is a direct relationship between the ankle and the hip. If the ankle is blocked the hip will not function properly. The rider will have a stiff seat and will have to use excessive muscular effort to stay on the horse. This tension will result in a stiff, resistant horse.

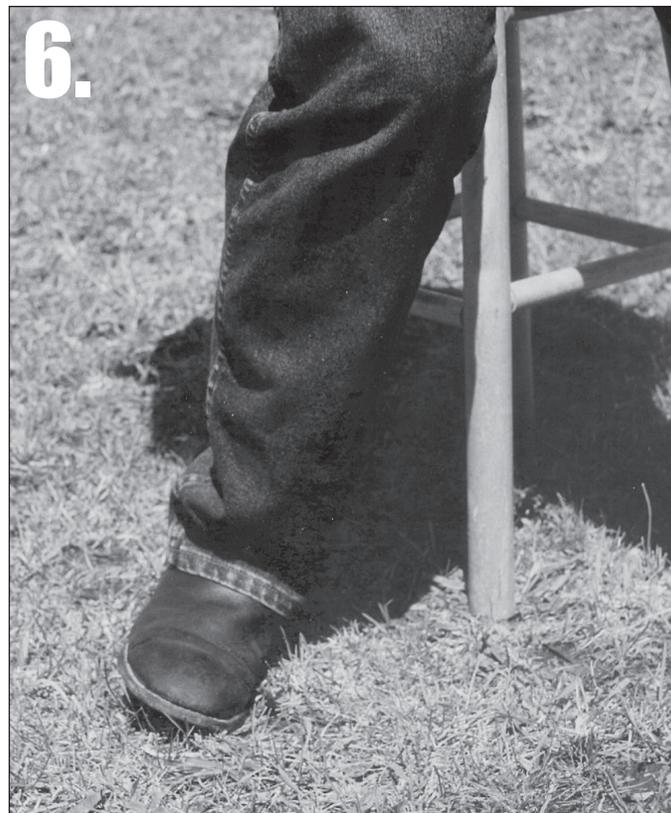
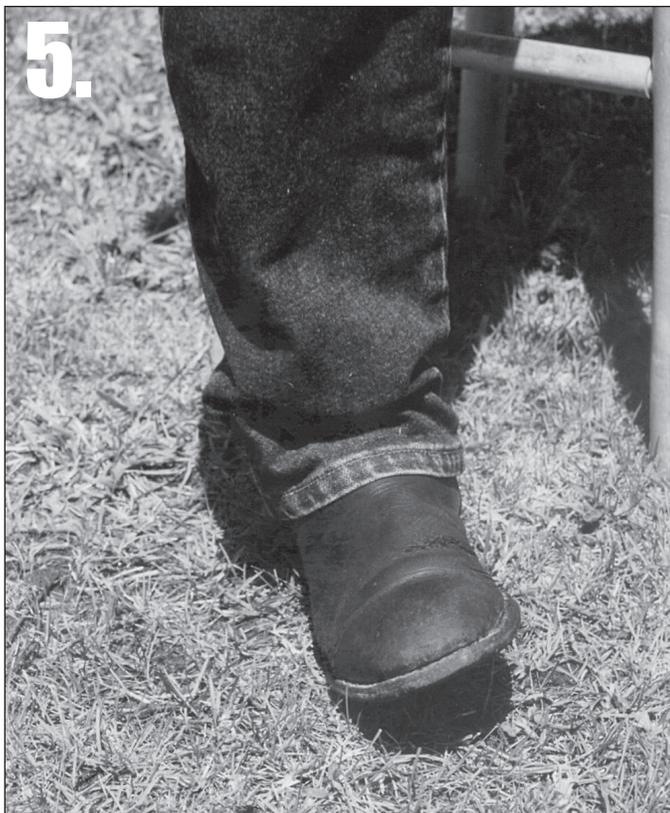
How to free the ankle from tension

The following exercise will help you to develop a solid platform for your foot in the stirrup with a springy ankle. Begin by doing this exercise off the horse so that you have the feeling of the ground underneath your entire foot. When your foot is in the stirrup you only have support underneath the ball of the foot. You will have to know what it would feel like if the support were under the whole foot. I suggest you do this lesson without shoes when off the horse for better ankle mobility.

Throughout the exercise I am going to refer to different parts of your foot. For consistency I will refer to four different points: (Photo 1.)

- Point 1 - Inside heel
- Point 2 - Big toe area
- Point 3 - Pinkie toe area
- Point 4 - Outside heel.

In all of these exercises it is important to only do what is comfortable rather than "working harder to make it happen". If you find anything difficult, do less even if that means only visualizing the exercise. The more often you repeat this exercise the more fluid your ankles will become. This is something



you can do under the table while at a boring dinner party!

Once you establish the patterns on the ground, take the exercises to the saddle. Remember that when you're in the stirrup you won't have any support underneath the back part of the foot. So look for the same feelings in the hip that you noticed while performing this exercise on the ground.

Sit on a flat surface of comfortable height such that your foot can rest flat on the ground with some bend in your knee. If you are too low it will be difficult to notice what is happening in your hip. If you are too high you will have difficulty getting your foot flat on the ground.

I will give you directions for one foot in this exercise. Afterward, on your own, do the other foot, then both feet at the same time. It is best to do all the movements on one foot before switching to the other side. This will create a greater comparison in your brain for what is happening in your hip and ankle.

With your right foot flat on the ground begin by lifting off all the points except point 1. (Photo 2.) In other words lift the big toe, pinkie toe and out side heel so that only the inside heel remains on the floor. If this is difficult or uncomfortable then just begin to lift the other points then return the whole foot to the floor. Repeat this several times.

This position might remind you of someone else's riding style. In some cases the heel is jammed down to the inside so hard you can see the entire sole of the rider's boot. Notice what this position does to the hip joint and thigh. The hip closes at

the front and the thigh pinches inward. Some people believe that this position will "lock them in" which it can if you use a lot of inner thigh strength.

However, this position may also lock the horse's back out because there is no room for the horse to lift its back up into your seat. As the thighs pinch with the hamstring muscles contract leaving little to no room between your legs. The harder your push on the heels the more you could push your seat out of the saddle.

Next pick up all points on of your foot except for point 2. (Photo 3.) Now you are like the beginning rider in fetal position. The heel is well up. Notice again what happens to the knee, thigh and hip. The knee is pinching, the thigh has come in and the hip is closed at the front. Again there is no room in your seat for your horse. You have pinched yourself off the saddle in this position with your seat bones shooting out behind you.

Continue with only having points 3 and 4 on the floor. When Point 3 (Photo 4.) is the only part of the foot on the floor the foot may have curled. This is commonly seen in riders trying to wrap their leg around the horse or dressage riders grinding their heels into the horse's sides.

Another place where this foot position is common is the Western rider whose saddle fenders have not been shaped. When the fenders are really short or the saddle is not broken in, the stirrup will continually try to hang parallel to the horse's sides instead of perpendicular. This constant tug of the leather



on the rider's foot will cause the ankle to roll over to the outside similar to point 3 or 4 only.

When only on point 4 (Photo 5.) there is a similarity to only point three in that the foot tries to wrap around the horse but now the outside of the leg is really rigid. The leg is unable to move separate from the pelvis so that application of a leg aid will also elicit a tremendous amount of upper body movement. With points 3 and 4 the hip is more open at the front but the thigh has come away from the horse.

Repeat the above positions with one modification. This time, instead of removing the other parts of the foot from the floor, simply shift enough to feel more weight on each point without lifting the other parts of the foot. Notice what happens in the knee, thigh and hip. Pay special attention to the area between your sacrum (the pie shaped bone at the back of your pelvis) and the hip. There are times when you will notice this area widen.

Check that you are not tightening your buttock or moving your shoulders as you roll over the four points of your foot. If you are then you are using your entire body to shift the weight over the four points instead of having an "independent" leg and only moving from your hip joint.

If your body is helping to perform these movements of the foot it means that when you are riding you are using far more of your body to apply a leg aid than you know. This will cause the horse to have to adjust to your displaced body weight before he can react to your leg aid. Once you can move around

your foot without shifting the weight across your seat or using your upper body in any way, you will much more independent leg aids.

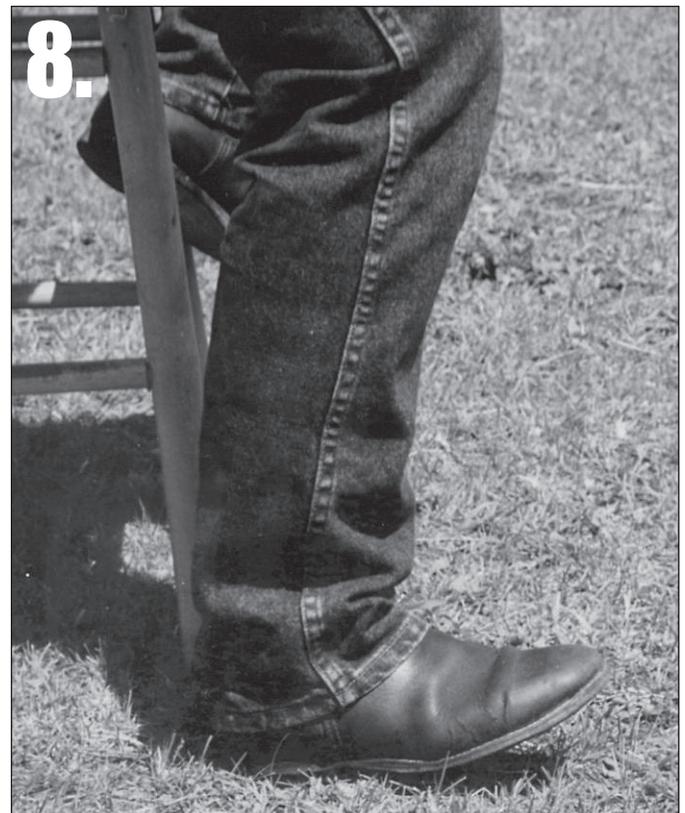
See if you can make a smooth clockwise circular movement as you go from one point to the next. Then reverse the circle so that you are going counter-clockwise. You will have to let go of excess tension in the hip area to make the circles slow and smooth. Notice if there is some point in the circle where you hold your breath. If so, go back and forth across these points until you can do it without any change in your breathing.

Next, rock your foot from side to side going from points 1 and 2 (Photo 6.) over to points 3 and 4 (Photo 7.). Again notice how this effects your hip joint.

Finally move diagonally across the foot. Go from point 1 to point 3 and then from point 4 to 2. Do this several times. See if you create a flowing motion as you move across the foot.

It is fine if you want to take a short break between each of these different exercises. It might even be a good idea to get up and walk around for a moment. Notice if there is a difference between the two sides of your body when you walk. Does your foot feel different when it meets the ground? Do you feel more solid on the side you have just worked?

Finally, locate a place in the center of the foot by going around the foot moving from point to point, then across the foot moving side-to-side. When you find the center your weight will feel spread evenly across the entire foot. You might even notice that your seat has deepened on the chair with the





hip area relaxed.

By the time you are done with the above exercises the ankle, knee and hip will feel soft and relaxed. There will be a marked deepening of the seat bone and relaxation in the muscles of the buttocks while the shoulders may even have dropped an inch or two. Now your ankle is ready for “heels down”.

To deepen the heel simply think of lifting points 2 and 3 (the toes points) rather than trying to push the heel points down (Photo 8.). This will cause the ankle to flex without jamming into the heel. You might feel a little tension on the front of your calf or a slight stretching at the back however your leg should remain underneath you. This is in marked contrast to pushing the heel forward and down (Photo 9.)

Do both positions, pushing the heel forward and down vs. lifting the toes (Photo 9 and 8). Notice what happens to your knee in the two different positions. Now think of standing up over each position. Which one will allow you to use your leg for support? Which one makes it nearly impossible to stand up over? When your foot is braced out in front of you, you have to throw your upper body forward to get over your foot. Whereas when you flex the toes up you could stand up easily. (Photo 10.)

Next time you ride repeat these exercises with each foot. Remember that once you are in the stirrup you don't have a solid surface as a reference. You are going to have to use

the feelings you felt in your ankle, foot and hip when on the ground as reference points for work in the saddle.

By going through all the different positions you will have a better feel for what your habitual pattern is and how to change it. You are looking for the foot position that has the greatest amount of flexibility, support and security. As you ride notice if you tend to go more towards the outside of your foot (points 3 and 4) or more towards the inside of your foot (points 1 and 2). Experiment by going back and forth across the foot until you feel a balanced position. What does your horse do in response to these different choices?

Once you establish a platform of security in your feet with a soft absorbing ankle your hip will be able to open while maintaining a deep seat. You might even notice that your horse starts lifting his back up into your seat rather than dropping away. Experiment with your old foot position and your new one. Notice the difference in your horse as you change back and forth.

Ultimately the ankle needs to be able to respond to the situation by having the flexibility to provide a solid base of support at all times. Taking a moment to explore all the different possibilities of the foot you will be able to use all possible options when necessary, instead of being fixed into a position. So next time someone tells you to jam your heels down excessively you might ask them why they want you to do that instead of having a supple responsive ankle.



5-Minute Warm Up #1

Find Your Hips

Place both reins in one hand. Rest your rein hand on the horse's withers or somewhere comfortable to stabilize you. Gently take your free hand down the front of your thigh a few times. See how far down your thigh you can go easily. Can you reach your knee? Don't force this or any movements in this lesson.

Notice how much of you is involved in running your hand down your thigh. Are you moving just from the elbow, shoulder or are you doing this movement from somewhere else? Do you push your lower leg forward, back or leave it alone as you slide your hand down your thigh? Pull it back behind you. What happens to your ability to slide your hand down your thigh? How much effort does it take to slide down your thigh when you push against the stirrup? What happens to your knee in this position? Allow your leg to simply hang underneath you. What happens now as you slide your hand down your thigh?

Where are you looking as you are sliding your hand down your thigh? Experiment with looking towards your hand, away from your hand away from your hand on the same side of the horse and away from your hand towards the opposite side of the horse as you slide it down your thigh. What is the difference? Can you keep your eyes on your hand while you turn your head in each of the three directions as you slide your hand down your thigh? Make sure you go slowly, perhaps turning your head at a different speed you're your sliding hand. Does this change the movement in your neck and shoulders?

Experiment with using the palm of your hand on your thigh vs. the back of your hand. How are these two positions different? What happens in your shoulder when you use the back of your hand vs. your palm? Which position allows you to go further down your thigh with less effort? How does this relate to holding the reins?

Does anything happen in your chest as you slide your hand down your thigh? Do you round your upper back or arch it as you slide your hand down your thigh. Experiment with rounding your shoulders and upper back. What happens



For All Warm Ups

It is best if you review this exercise off the horse first so that you know what to do when you are mounted. It is a bit difficult to read directions and ride at the same time. Please make sure your horse is quite and comfortable with your hands moving around him before attempting this exercise. It would be best to work in an enclosed environment. Also use judgment when attempting this or any other exercise, which may be inappropriate if your horse is anxious or nervous. When appropriate, allow your horse to follow along with the exercise. You might notice that he begins loosen up with you.

Do not force or strain to do any of these movements. It is only important that you move in a certain direction—not how large you can make the movement. You can start standing still and then proceed to walk, trot if you like. Only move up to the next gait if you are comfortable and relaxed. If you find that you are uncomfortable or holding your breath, drop back down a gait even if that means a standstill.

Start with your easy side first. That way you can explore what you already know rather than becoming frustrated with what seems difficult. Return to the easy side anytime you find that you can't do the movement on the less easy side i.e.: teach yourself by exploring how you do things on the easy side.





to your head? Where are you looking now? Then experiment with hollowing your back as you run your hand down your thigh. Again, notice what happens with your head and neck.

Also notice if you twist your ribcage or keep it straight as your hand moves towards your knee. Does the movement of the ribcage change if you look towards or away from your hand? How does this effect the movement in your neck and shoulders?

Next observe what is happening in your hip joints. Are they opening or closing as you run your hand down your thigh? Does the position of your back (rounded or arched) effect the movement in your hips? See if you can find a middle position between rounded and hollow. Does this alter where you begin the movement of running your hand down your thigh?

Finally, observe where your weight is when you slide your hand down your thigh. Does it feel like you are leaning off the side of the horse? Which seat bone feels heavier? If you are doing this at the walk notice what the horse does as you run

your hand down your thigh. Does he begin to walk in circles, lean in or drift out? Does the position of your head as you move your hand alter the direction the horse walks?

Return to the original movement of taking your hand down your thigh towards your knee. How much of you is involved with the movement now? Is it simpler or easier to do with less effort? Can you go further (perhaps even sliding off your knee in the same line as your thigh) than the first time?

Repeat this exercise on the other side and notice if it feels different. See if you can determine what is different. Is it in the shoulder, arm, head, and/or hip? Can you allow your whole self, head, arms, shoulder, and hip and legs, to be part of the overall picture? As you move up into the walk and trot notice how much of you resists or limits the movement of your hand down your thigh. Can you find where you can let go of excess muscular effort to make the exercise easy at the faster gaits?

As always have fun with this little warm up. You might find that both you and your horse move a little bit easier after just a few minutes each way.



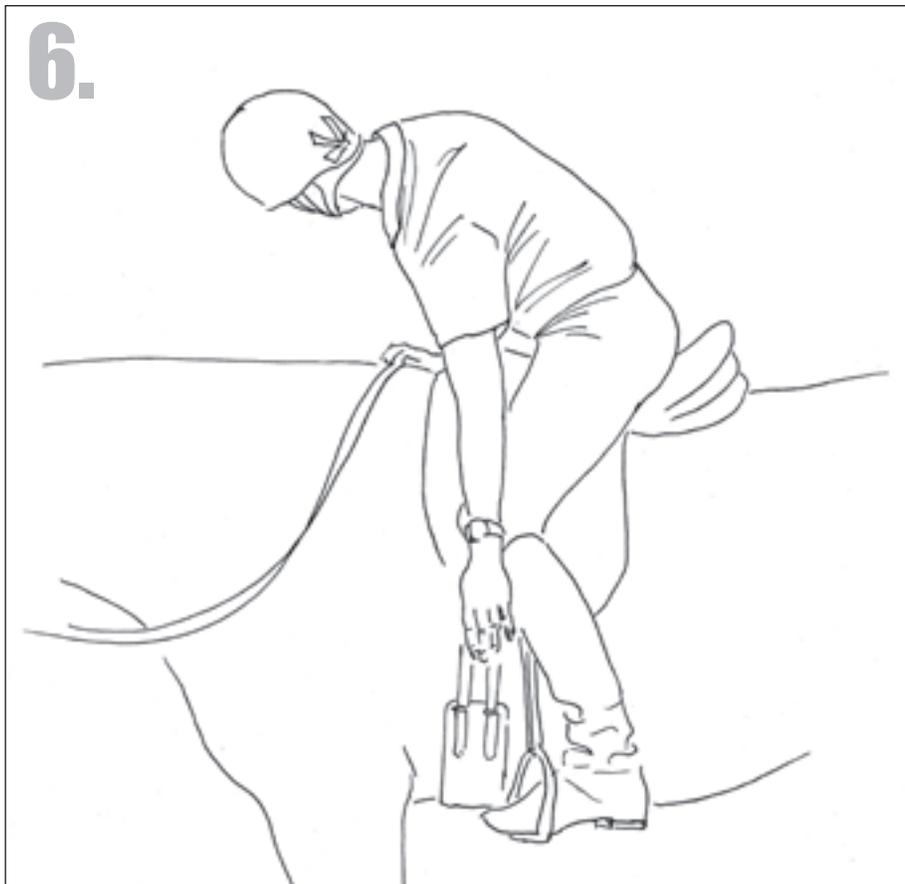
4.



5.



6.



5-Minute Warm Up #2

Free Your Rib Cage

Have you ever gotten on your horse and noticed that he feels a bit stiff one direction? Or perhaps you feel a bit more stiff one way than the other. Especially when temperatures start to dip it's a good idea to take a few minutes to loosen up before asking your horse to work.

This little exercise will help alleviate some of the stiffness in both you and your horse and you might find bending and turns are easier for both of you.

It is best if you practice this exercise off the horse first so that you know what to do when you are mounted. It is a bit difficult to read directions and ride at the same time. Please make sure your horse is quiet and comfortable with your hands moving over his back and onto his hip before attempting this exercise. It would be best to work in an enclosed environment. Also use judgment when attempting this or any other exercise, which may be inappropriate if your horse is anxious or nervous. If you can, allow your horse to follow along with the exercise. You might notice that he begin loosen up with you.

Do not force or strain to do any of these movements. It is only important that you move in a certain direction – not how large you can make the movement. You can start standing still and then proceed to walk, trot if you like. Only move up to the next gait if you are comfortable and relaxed. If you find that you are uncomfortable or holding your breath, drop back down a gait.

Here's the five-minute warm up.

Begin on your easy side first. Place both reins in the outside hand. Rest your outside hand on the horse's withers or somewhere comfortable. Gently take your hand that is free back towards the horse's tail a few times. Notice how much of you is involved with moving your arm back. Are you moving just from the shoulder or are you doing this movement from somewhere else? Where are you looking?

Now allow your head to follow the movement of your hand. Slowly take your head and hand back towards your horse's hip. Only do what is comfortable. Repeat this a few times.

Next let your shoulders your head and your hand move back towards your horse's hip. Again repeat this a few times slowly and easily. How much of you is involved with the movement now? What is happening in your rib cage?

If you can, rest your hand on the point of your horse's hip. If



you can't reach the point of the hip rest your hand wherever you can reach comfortably. Notice if your horse has begun following your movements by turning to the right. It is ok to allow your horse to do this.

With your hand resting on the horse's point of the hip take your hip on that side back towards your hand. You will only be able to do a little movement. Do not try too hard. Only do what is easy. Notice what the horse does. Then take your hip in the opposite direction (towards the outside shoulder). How hard or easy is this? What does your horse do now?

Return to the original movement of taking your hand back towards the horse's hip. How much of you is involved with the movement this time? Does the horse follow you now by turning in that direction?

Repeat this exercise on the other side and notice if it feels different. See if you can determine what is different. Is it in the shoulder, arm, head, and/or hip? If you allow your head, arms, shoulder, and hip to turn in the same direction what does the horse do? If you turn any one part in the opposite direction what happens? Is it easier for both of you to bend both directions?

Have fun with this little warm up. You might find that both you and your horse move better after spending just a few minutes each way.



5-Minute Warm Up #3

Finding the Lengthen of Your Spine

Sit on a level surface or a physioball that is high enough for you to have a right angle behind your knee and thigh.

Place your left forearm on your thigh with your hand on your knee. Leave your right arm free otherwise you will be too restricted to do the exercise.

Notice the position of your spine, head and pelvis while you are sitting in this position. Most likely you will be flexed or rounded in the back and curves to the left since you only have your left elbow on your left knee. This is intentional.

Gently change the curve of your spine from flexion to extension (hollowing your back) making sure you leave your left arm on your left thigh.

Notice what part of your spine moves as you flex and extend. What happens with your pelvis, spine and head? Did you only move one part of your spine or did the movement include the entire spine?

Repeat this movement many times gently, going from flexion to extension. Rest when you need to. Notice if each time you change if you find a place where you can stop using excessive muscles effort so that the overall movement gets easier and, as a result, larger.

Be very careful to sense and feel where you are making great effort, do not force the movement in any way.

Repeat the movement several times then rest and come back to it again.

Notice what your head does as you go from flexion to extension. Does your head follow the movement of your spine, not move at all or go opposite the movement of your spine. In other words, does the head drop as you flex (round your back) and rise up and back as you arch (hollow) your back? Does your head and neck try to do all the work while your upper back remains essentially fixed in one position?

Now keep your arm on your thigh and only move your head a few times. Go gently since you do not want to go beyond the comfortable limit for your neck.

Repeat the original movement arching and rounding your back. Is it easier now? Does your head go with the movement of your spine? Can you go further without effort? Rest.

Place your left arm on your left thigh again. This time only move your pelvis leaving your spine and head relatively still. Move your pelvis so that you feel your seat bones coming under you as you round your back and going out behind you as you arch your back. Again, only do what is comfortable and easy. Rest.

Repeat the original movement of arching and rounding the spine observing if the movement through the entire spine is

clearer now. Is it easier than the first time? Can you go further with less effort? Rest.

Place your left arm on your left thigh again. This time arch and round your back making the movement smaller and smaller. Notice as you go through a midpoint between arching and rounding. See if you can sense and feel this middle place. Notice that when you are in the middle place that there is a widening across the pelvis, the hips feel like they sink back and down and your head lengthens away from you. You are searching for the place where you can feel your pelvis and head lengthen away from each other. Rest again.

Once more arch and round your back in very small movements with your arm on your thigh until you feel the place where you feel long. Now come up to sitting maintaining this alignment of your spine. This is where your top line and underline are lengthened. Notice the movement of your head and neck with your spine lengthened. Imagine lengthening a tiny bit more and sense if your head goes slightly upward towards the ceiling. This is a very small movement so be careful not to exaggerate or you could wind up hollowing your back and neck.

Gently move your head looking left and right to sense and feel the freedom of your head and neck. Slightly round your back. What happens to the freedom of your head and neck? Now arch slightly. Again notice what happens to the movement of your head and neck.

When the spine is lengthened the head and neck has more freedom of movement than in the other two positions. Make sure you do very small movements or you may not be able to feel the difference.

Switch to the other side (right forearm on right thigh) and repeat the lesson. Is it easier on this side?

Next time you are on your horse repeat the exercise. Place one hand on your knee with your elbow on your thigh. You will have to bend forward in order to be able to do this. You may have to push your seat back in the saddle to have enough room to arch your back comfortably with your arm on your thigh.

Gently arch and round your back. Pay special attention to the change from arching to rounding. Can you feel when the spine is neither arched nor rounded? Think of lengthening your head away from your seat. Then come up to sitting and feel what it is like to sit with your spine lengthened.

As you ride think of lengthening through your spine. Notice what happens in your pelvis and hips. Does this make a difference to the way your horse moves? Go back to your old position and feel the difference. Go back and forth from your old position to your lengthened position and compare how your horse responds. Notice what happens to your horse's back as you lengthen through your spine.



