

HOW TO REFINE YOUR RIDE -

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Over the years we have all tried different exercises for strengthening. There are so many, so how do you choose? You can spend time searching the internet or asking friends and family. Then to decide what equipment, bands, weights, straps, there are so many choices. It can be daunting to figure out where to start and what exercises are good as a horse back rider. Let me take away your fears and confusion by showing you where to start and how to keep it simple.

Getting balanced on the horse starts with your feet on the ground specifically activating muscles to improve your strength in the saddle. Remember, you, the rider, are an important part of the horse and rider athletic team. As good horse owners and riders, we tend to focus most of our attention on our horses: the horse's balance, warm-ups, cool-downs, treatments, but what about you!

I want to draw your attention to YOU! Think about your ride, do you find that you always collapse to one side, fix with one arm, prefer to turn to one side, have back, hip, or other joint pain? Then it is time to start correcting yourself.

The first place I start with my riders are the hips and pelvis. If horses can feel a fly their back, then they can feel any slight changes in your seat. Many riders recognize that they have a "weaker" leg, and when adding that aide, they feel that the horse does not respond. You may be unaware that your aide is late or inaccurate, inevitably your horse responds accordingly. I have seen experienced riders exhibit frustration because they do not understand why their horse went off course. This happens in all disciplines. In dressage, a half pass in one direction is not as smooth, or a jumper loses time always turning one way.

There are special tests that I perform with my riders to determine if this leg is actually weak. Usually the test shows the leg is strong, but there is no balance and support from the opposite leg. If the hips are not equal in strength and flexibility, the rider will have an imbalance in the pelvis which translates to your seat in the saddle. The horse feels this imbalance in his back which will affect his overall performance. Just like the horse, the rider works in diagonals. Biomechanically, if the rider applies a force, there must be an equal and opposite force to stabilize allowing the horse's movement to happen effectively

Now, determine which one of your legs feels inadequate or into which stirrup you have difficulty shifting your weight. I'd like you to first perform a self-test. Remember, do not perform any of these tests or exercises if they cause pain or risk of injury. Maintain a safe environment

Self-test: Single leg stance for 30 seconds on solid surface: compare left vs. right. If the solid surface is easy and equal on each side, try standing on an unstable surface like a pillow or foam cushion. If you collapse while standing on one leg, or shake, or are unable to perform without holding on, part of the problem is likely that the Gluteus Medius is weak. So now what?!

I'm going to show you how to start with hip strengthening exercises that focus on the Gluteus Medius, aka glut med, which is a critical muscle for riders to strengthen. It is on the side and slightly to the back of the hip. It helps extend and rotate the leg. These are the first set of a progression of exercises that have shown to be most significantly effective in improving muscle strength in the Glut Med.



Exercise 1: Clams

Here I demonstrate a basic exercise to start activating the Gluteus Medius, we call clams. Starting alignment is very important to put the muscle in the optimal position. Lay on your side, start without the band if you have never done these before. Bend both knees, place top hand on your waist, keep your hips/pelvis rolled slightly forward. Engage your lower abdominals, you should feel the abs under your fingers, keep your feet together, then slowly lift your top knee rolling it slightly up and back. Only go as high as you can without letting your back, waist, or hand move. Rotate up as high as you can in a slow and controlled motion. Hold at the top for about 5 seconds then slowly lower down. If you are able to complete at least 20 clams with minimal fatigue, add a resistance band. The band should be flat and placed above the knees.



Exercise 2: Side Plank Clams

Here is a progression of the clams. As above, start without the band and progress as tolerated. Start in same position as above but come up on your elbow and forearm. Lift your hips keeping your top line straight from shoulder to knee. Keep your top hand on your waist, keep your hips/pelvis rolled slightly forward. Keep your feet together, then slowly lift your top knee rolling it slightly up and back. Only go as high as you can without dropping your hips. Rotate up as high as you can in a slow and controlled motion. Hold knee up for about 5 seconds then slowly lower down. If you are able to complete at least 20 clams with minimal fatigue, add a resistance band. The band should be flat and placed above the knees.

These exercises are a great way to start your balance and stabilization on the horse. I know there are so many choices for exercises, but it is best to keep it simple and focus on the most important for your goals.

During my rider performance clinics, riders will see and feel changes right away like this rider. The correction is simple and effective. I was able to correct the under-active hip and give symmetry in the seat. This activation can take a few minutes just before riding and I encourage this with all my riders at any level and in any discipline.

Practice these exercises every day before you ride and continue as tolerated through the progression. You will notice as you move through the exercises you will feel more stable in the saddle and require less effort using your aides to get your horse to move smoothly, efficiently, and accurately.



Pre-Treatment



Post-Treatment