

THE COUNTRY COB

CONTENT . COMMUNITY . CONNECTION . COLLABORATION



The • • •
Equilibrium
Issue



April is here, ushering in cooler weather and the close of the first quarter of 2024. The theme for this issue is Equilibrium which seems fitting at a time when we are all striving for balance in our lives, with our horse's diets, in our rider bodies, in training and in our approach to horsemanship in general.

In consideration of the polarity of opinions, different methods and approaches in all aspects of horsemanship, horsecare and competition it is certainly a time to learn, unlearn and relearn.

It is said that what separates mediocrity from excellence is often ignorance. "It's not what you do, it's how you do it." is a phrase that can be applied to all facets of horsemanship. But there is more to it. Intention is the missing aspect of good horsemanship. Asking ourselves why we do things and what our motivations are, starts a conversation that needs to be had. It is a mindful antidote to unwanted behaviour that is lacking in knowledge and responsibility. "When you know better you do better" is the level of accountability that speaks to the character of great horsemanship.

Whether you are at a riding school practicing grooming, or are an equine therapist assisting healing with horses or a professional rider - the learning and repetition of fundamental skills on a practical level are essential to understanding and managing your horse's well-being.

Learning about horses is however only one aspect of horsemanship, learning from the horse is the other. Conventional horsemanship can rob you of this connection as it is focussed on what you can take from the experience and not what you can gain. Observe and listen to the horse. This is where you start to connect at a heart based level.

In seeking a balanced, holistic approach we can see equilibrium as the meeting of two opposing energies that form a balance. How we collectively get to this space does not exclude challenges, problems and even chaos but ultimately it leads to the space where understanding resides.

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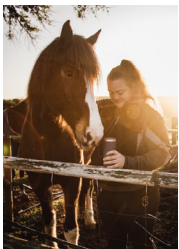
Happy Reading and Happy Riding 🐾

The Contributing Team



RIDER FITNESS SAM ST DARE

Is a qualified Sports Scientist and Sports Massage practitioner. She is currently working towards an Equine Physio qualification. In her free time Sam is working on her dressage to be eligible for some low-level eventing and liberty trains with her current lease horse.



WELFARE SAMANTHA ANCY

Holds a diploma in Equine Psychology, is a certified FTR and EFTR Practitioner and has recently completed the Equuscience Master Class Course. Her focus is on horse-human relationships and examining equine behaviour within this dynamic.



HEALTH CORLIA KOTZE

With a long list of impressive qualifications Corlia has 6 years of experience and is currently busy with her postgraduate Equine Osteopathic studies. She has a passion for helping animals and humans with a holistic approach, concentrating on the whole body.

COVER IMAGE

courtesy of Melissa Maeder seen here with her ride Louis (Foreign Affair)



INTEGRATIVE TRAINING TRACY CIOLLI

A teacher in training with Phillippe Karl's Ecole de Légèreté, Tracy is always looking for more skills and knowledge to incorporate into her training. Her teaching focusses on two-way communication, emotion and physical balance. Her approach is humble, open minded and structured.



HOLISTIC LARA SNYMAN

is originally from Germany, where she studied Animal Psychology. She has learned and applied many horse training techniques before listening to the horses and following their model instead. She helps humans and their horses at her Ibalansi Horse Center in Gordon's Bay, Cape Town.



CONTRIBUTOR DEBRA PADDOCK

Debra started her career in England and has over 6 decades of horsemanship to her name. As life progressed she discovered she was unable to live without horses. There is little she hasn't tried and is delighted to share her observations of a lifelong love affair with horses.

Disclaimer: Please note that any opinions expressed by writers and contributors are theirs alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of The Country Cob or HorsetalkSA.



CO-CREATING BALANCE WITH YOUR HORSE

EQUILIBRIUM BY DEFINITION IS A STATE OF BALANCE AND IS DESCRIBED AS A STATE OF MENTAL CALM

The above definitions perfectly put into words what a harmonious horse and rider pair should look like. As horses and humans are very different, and indeed somewhat opposing creatures in their body and mind, it takes conscious work to achieve a state of equilibrium with each other.

Horses are prey animals, moving in a horizontal balance, humans are predators, moving in a vertical balance. Our minds are always busy, problem solving and focused. Horses are always situationally aware, living in the moment - all their 'antennas' are switched on, while maintaining a state of peace and grazing for most of the day. If we want to mentally and physically move at the same wavelength with our breathing we can look at how foals (or befriended horses) move, perfectly synchronized alongside their moms - let's try and imitate this way of bonding. Position yourself at your horse's side, just by the shoulder, and breathe in, muscles tensioning up and walk next to each other. Then breathe out deeply, let all your muscles relax and come to a halt alongside your horse. You might encounter some issues here - the horse may want to hide behind you, rush ahead or simply move away. It may not see and feel you breathing out. Practice until you

are both moving as one unit. You can proceed to even practice this at a trot and canter later on - play with different up and down energies! Once your horse has a good balance between 'whoa' and 'go' energy, then you are one step towards your goal of being in a state of equilibrium.

You will realize that your thinking will also fade as you completely sync into the moment with your horse, simply feeling the breathing rhythms. This exercise will allow you to ride transitions without having to use too much rein or leg - your body tension and the change in your breathing rhythm will give your horse the necessary aids. The key position at your horse's side will help your horse grow self confidence, while maintaining respect, trust and focus in you. Most problems, such as horses being too slow, fast, spooky or frustrated are overcome when energies are aligned and a trust and self-confidence is established. This will eliminate most of the common riding issues.

In order to reach a harmonious, calm state of equilibrium there is a further point, a physical part we need to develop. We need to work on the horse's natural crookedness. This asymmetry originates in the way foals are curled up in their mom's womb - one side is more mobile, stretched and smooth, while the other side is more constricted. You will notice that your horse seems to 'fall' in on the one shoulder, while drifting out on the other.

One shoulder/front leg carries more weight, while one hind leg pushes more, and the other steps under further, taking up more weight. Once we sit on the horse's back, we add to that natural asymmetry, making it scary for a prey and flight animal as they feel off-balance and fear they may

stumble or even fall over. The rider also sits on the horse's forehand, which is naturally already heavier, straining tendons and joints even more. It is our duty to prepare the horse to carry us as best as it possibly can.

The old classical dressage masters knew how to straighten the horses in a healthy manner. Use all the different types of lateral movements to help your horse discover their point of balance: shoulder in, haunches in, half passes, pirouettes and stepping over on a circle as well as stepping backwards straight and evenly. These exercises will strengthen your horse's tummy muscles, which in turn will lift their back. The natural arching throughout the vertebrae will prevent discomfort, calcifications, arthritis and "kissing" spines. Not only do we strengthen the horse's body, the lateral and backwards movements have a strong beneficial affect on the horse's mind: crossing the legs keeps horses on the thinking, logical side of the brain, while stepping back shifts weight onto the hindquarters, signaling to the brain that we are not in 'flight' mode. You might have noticed how hard it is to stop a frightened horse - they throw all their weight onto the forehand, which allows for a quicker flight response.

Once your horse has been synchronized to your breathing and energy, and its body is symmetrical and strong, you are left with one more task: YOU as a rider have the duty to be as light a mental and physical weight as possible to carry! Strengthen your own core muscles continuously, work on a smooth rein and independent seat, while not forgetting that your horse doesn't only carry your physical, but also your emotional load. Be conscious of your thoughts and stay in the present moment while co-creating moments of equilibrium with your beautiful horse! 🐾

“You will realize that your thinking will also fade as you completely sync into the moment with your horse, only feeling the breathing rhythms”



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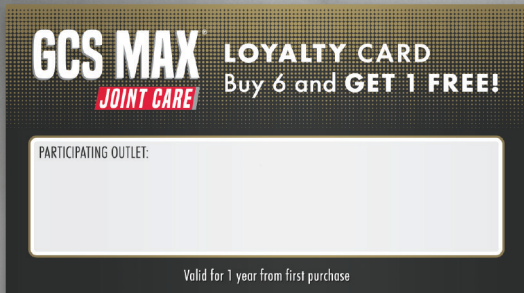
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Friends, Forage and FREEDOM

IN A TIME WHEN WE ARE SEEING AN INCREASING AMOUNT OF PRESSURE ON SOCIAL MEDIA WITH REGARDS TO EQUINE WELFARE, WE MAY FIND OURSELVES WITH MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

We are living in a time when the focus on mental and emotional health is not only reserved for just people but is echoing into the lives of our domesticated horses and how they exist and cohabitate in their environments.

Let's talk about the three F's and how with these principles we can create a workable balance within the constraints of modern-day horse living.

FRIENDS

Horses are highly social animals, just encounter one herd-bound horse, and you'll quickly realize they prefer having their buddies close by for that added sense of security, they find safety in numbers. Within optimal environments they form very strong

social connections, often forming pair bonds that can last a lifetime. While humans and horses have very distinct behavioural and biological traits, certain parallels are evident when considering the social needs in both species. Solitary confinement, a practice often considered the highest form of punishment in the correctional system, due to its detrimental effects of increased anxiety, depression and sometimes even paranoia, only echoes the importance of engagement for sociable species.

Similarly, when it comes to meeting horses' social needs, being part of a herd will always be first prize. It's in this setting that they really thrive, engaging in activities like mutual grooming, resting together, as well as play. Even if it's just a duo, these needs can still be met. Herd environments are also not about just chucking a bunch of horses together, a good understanding of herd dynamics is needed. Groups need to be well balanced without overcrowding.

In situations where space constraints limit turnout options, ensuring visual and touch contact among horses becomes crucial. This can include the absence of electric fencing between paddocks and even in-hand walks with other horses, this will allow opportunities for physical interaction. For horses stabled overnight, low walls are highly beneficial allowing each horse to maintain visual contact with the rest of the herd, which fosters a sense of connectedness and security.

FORAGE

Horses are predominantly grazers, they typically spend 16-18 hours a day grazing. Their grazing behaviour is two-fold, it is within their evolutionary history as trickle feeders, as well as having a digestive biology that is geared towards eating small amounts throughout the day and night. Horses have a constant production of stomach acid so if they go for prolonged periods without access to roughage, this acid can potentially cause gut ulcerations.

When a horse moves away from an ideal grazing situation we need to assess each horse as an individual. Making necessary feed changes accordingly to their eating habits and unique blend of behavioural traits can be very beneficial to maintaining emotional balance around feeding. Boredom, for instance, can prompt increased eating, making it crucial to address social needs.

While slow feeders can help in regulating intake, it's essential to consider the size of the holes in the nets, as overly restrictive feeders can frustrate horses. Hanging many smaller nets or distributing roughage boxes throughout the paddock can encourage movement, stimulating natural behaviours and promoting blood circulation which is beneficial for overall well-being and optimal bodily function, especially in smaller restrictive spaces.

Opting for roughage low in sugar or non-structural carbohydrates (NSC) is advantageous as it avoids aggravating anxiety levels that may already exist. Allowing free access to quality, low-sugar grass has proven effective in reducing both scoffing and food aggression. This approach alleviates anxiety associated with the fear of running out of food.

salt licks in the stable or paddock, make sure there are spaces to roll and sleep in soft sand. Let them run, take them down to the big unused paddock or enclosed arena and just let them do as they please whether it be exploring new areas or stretching their legs.

Many stereotypical behaviours manifest as coping mechanisms

“In natural environments, horses enjoy the freedom to simply just be themselves. Whether it's rolling, playing, resting, grooming each other, or just wandering around.”

FREEDOM

Freedom for horses is about horses being able to make their own choices within their own time without unnecessary restrictions. Considering that there are 24 hours in a day, and at most 1 hour of that is taken up with training, we need to be aware and considerate of their needs. In natural environments, horses enjoy the freedom to simply just be themselves. Whether it's rolling, playing, resting, grooming each other, or just wandering around.

There are of course ways we can honour the horses unique preferences and autonomy without imposing our own ideals on them, here is where the little things count. Grassy patches between paddock and working arena don't always have to be a no-go zone, if you have the time, allow the horse to graze. Hang

or expressions of frustration, boredom, or stress because of the environment not being conducive to mental and emotional wellbeing. These can include weaving, crib biting, pacing, aggressive defensiveness, and even self-mutilation. There are so many clips that circle social media depicting stable behaviours that are intended as funny, when in reality there is an animal showing distress. Without even knowing it, we find ourselves laughing at the misfortune of another living breathing soul.

If we can identify where in their living environment there is imbalance - we still have options to enrich their lives, all it takes is implementation. It starts with taking responsibility for the life we chose guardianship over and holding ourselves accountable to maintaining their equilibrium. 🐾

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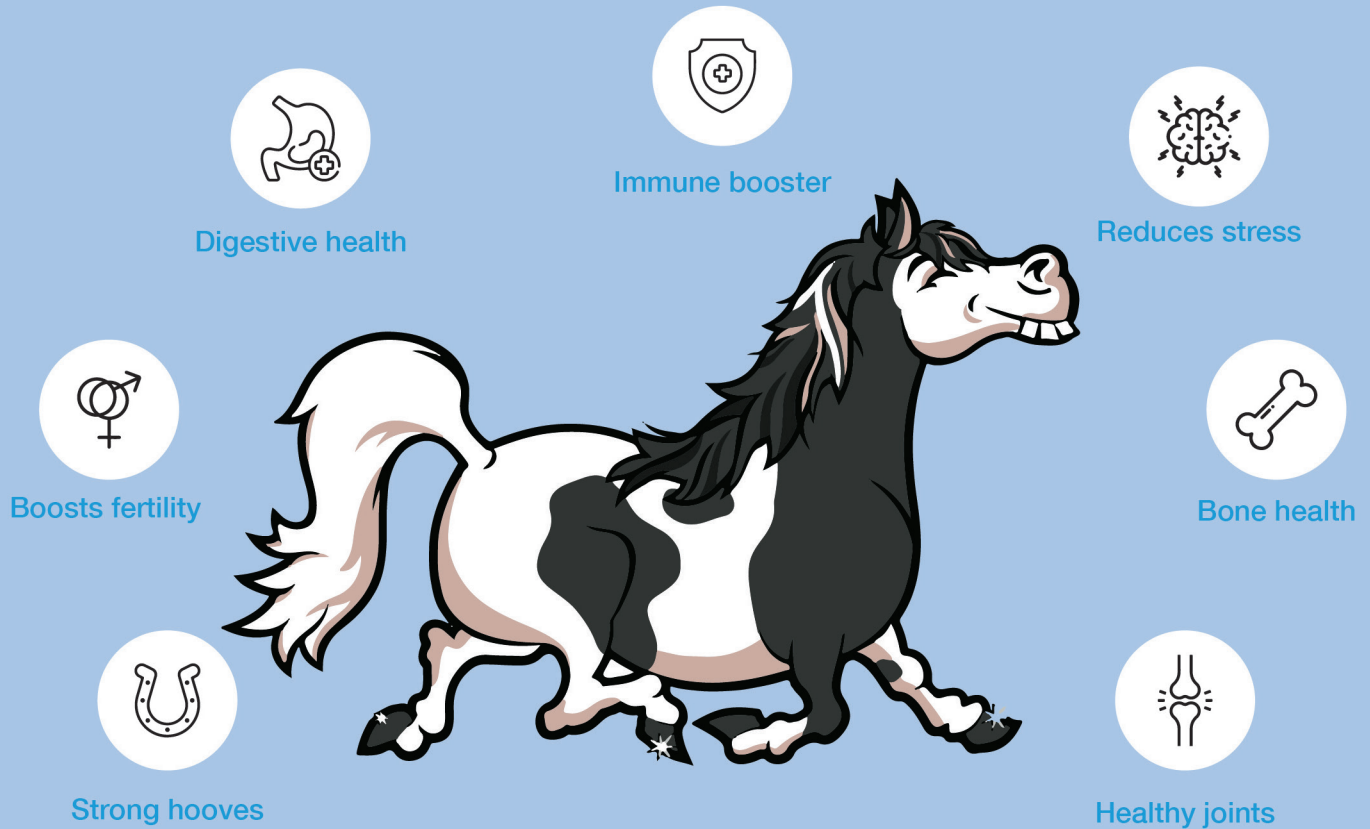
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*PROGRESSING AS A RIDER
IS DICTATED BY YOUR
PERSONAL GOALS AND
INTENTIONS BUT ALSO
BY THE PROFESSIONALS
THAT INFLUENCE YOU
ALONG THE WAY*

For years there has been ongoing debate on the pros and cons of being taught by qualified and unqualified instructors vs coaches who teach based on the knowledge of their own riding skills and experience. How does one navigate a largely unregulated system?

THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN A QUALIFIED INSTRUCTOR OR A RESPECTED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE COACH

A qualified instructor is by virtue a professional who has invested time, money and energy into a system that is committed to responsible practice based on good horsemanship. A qualified professional has been taught how to identify and correct rider errors, give instructions and make relevant corrections.

Learning to ride at a very fundamental level is about learning how to work with and move your body in sync with the horse's movement, how to maintain control of the horse and how to get the horse to move in the direction and at the pace you want to go. A qualified instructor will have the required subject matter, knowledge and ability to impart this information in a manner that is easily understandable. Although sounding seemingly easy, basic riding is one of the most specialized areas of teaching as the responsibility and safety

of the rider lies with the Instructor until the rider can manage the horse safely by themselves. An Instructor's job is to work towards creating a rider who is independent. This process can be broken down into three stages:

BEGINNER

- Learning to walk, trot, canter
- Steering and speed control
- Small jumps

NOVICE

- Working on an independent seat
- The use of correct aids
- Developing a feel
- Competing at the lower levels

SPECIALISED COACHING

- Moving into discipline-specific riding at higher levels with a higher intensity and demand of fitness

The biggest concern in the industry is that riders are being taught at entry level by unqualified Instructors that are not adequately equipped with the correct skill sets. Often there are no safety requirements in place, such as first aid and general equine safety knowledge. These are essential to mitigate the risk of accident and injury. Having lessons with an unqualified teacher is not only a safety risk but the process of learning to care, manage and respect the horse is often not addressed. Being taught basic skills by a knowledgeable instructor at this level is an invaluable part of the process and is extremely rewarding for the student.

The second concern is that riders are skipping or moving too quickly through novice level coaches and are moving on to specialised coaches without having important fundamentals in place. These riders end up moving into the school of hard knocks where their ambition outweighs their experience and they spend more time in a revision phase at this level ultimately progressing more slowly. The novice level is an essential step to gain exposure, to spend hours in the saddle, to refine

“There is a huge legacy attached to guardianship in horsemanship, ... currently there is much focus on welfare in the sport at the higher levels.”

the basic aids, learn different skills and develop a feel and an independent seat.

The third stage as a functional independent rider is often a space that is dominated by higher level coaches who may or may not be qualified but who teach on the basis of their own experience. The best coaches at this level are those who are advanced in their own education as instructors and are able to impart sound knowledge based on solid principles as well as experience. Ideally a rider will move to a specialised coach when they have achieved the goals set out by their novice level coach and a decision has been made to focus on a specific discipline so that they can progress with this focus at a higher level.

As a rider advances through the stages the intensity and physical demand increases. With this in mind there is a huge legacy attached to guardianship in horsemanship and currently there is much focus on welfare in the sport at the higher levels. Learning and progressing with riding, although hard work should always be enjoyable. A coach who promises quick results with minimal expectation from the rider is a major red flag. The less work the rider does the more the horse has to compensate. This is the time when how one rides becomes a welfare issue. We should work with coaches that advocate a “do no harm” policy when training and should always be working towards improving ourselves so that we can make our horse's jobs easier. Keeping the balance between performance and partnership. 🐾

QUALITIES OF A GOOD INSTRUCTOR

A good Instructor should be process orientated and help you set goals, but also be able to manage expectations and be strong enough to tell you what you need to know and not necessarily what you expect or want to hear.

The horse needs to be considered as much as the rider so always look for someone who gives you a good feel, practices good horsemanship and has a genuine love and connection to their own horses.

A student and their Instructor need to be compatible. Sometimes the Instructor can have all the right credentials but there is an incompatibility between the student and the teacher that can become a stumbling block.

An Instructor must be assertive but also have empathy and basic psychology skills. An experienced Instructor should be able to pick up non verbal cues. This is an invaluable skill to have when working with people and horses.



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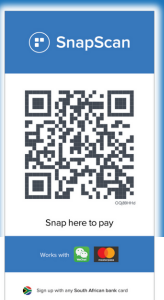
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Physical aspects of balance in training are starting to get a lot of attention, as they should by anyone wanting to ride, but we need to give equal attention to the holistic equilibrium. Yes, physical balance is absolutely necessary for a physically sound ridden horse, but overall balance in the training program is paramount for the horse's wellbeing. Balance of and between body, mind and spirit of the horse; and balance of the rider, horse and the relationship that connects them. Equilibrium requires balancing forces. The more force you apply, the more force is needed to balance your input. The more focus on only one aspect the more compensatory forces will arise in other areas.

PHYSICAL

Balance does not simply mean that the horse doesn't fall over. Efficient balance requires optimal body alignment for movement and to minimise unnecessary tension and force required to maintain this alignment in motion without putting undue strain on the body. For the horse to be able to balance without unnecessary tension and to lift the thorax to carry the rider without strain, we need to help them improve their straightness. All horses have a natural crookedness which offsets the stable base of support. Optimal alignment of and rotation through the spine is needed, otherwise there will always be compensatory forces within the horse's body.

The horse is also naturally on the forehand and does not maintain a stable rectangular base in turns. Unridden this does not cause problems, because the horse is not designed to carry a load or turn frequently. Therefore, if we want to ride a horse, we have a responsibility to explain and develop a more efficient way of balancing them

Observing the points of **BALANCE**

*A BALANCED HORSE IS MORE THAN
JUST A PHYSICALLY BALANCED
BODY. TRAINING SHOULD RESPECT
BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT*

and their load. The influence of the rider is one of the horse's biggest obstacles to balance. Simply carrying a load requires the horse to learn a new way of balancing and a new way of moving in balance. When this load is itself unbalanced and crooked, it creates further problems for the horse. A crooked rider creates an incorrect rotation through the thoracic spine. The other problem riders cause is to hold the horse in 'balance'. The horse's body must not be held in balance - force creates resistance, a force is needed then to balance the extra force applied by the rider, usually resulting in activation of incorrect muscles and compensation patterns. A horse that is held 'in balance' cannot find self carriage.

EMOTIONAL

It is important not to forget the horses primary need to feel safe. The more unsafe the horse feels the more 'force' it will apply to try and feel safe. Relaxation during work is a must. However, this does not mean complete relaxation, but rather a good balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. In other words, enough tension and arousal to complete the job efficiently but not with excess emotional and physical tension resulting in a survival response or the body fighting itself. What you are aiming for is that perfect balance resulting in 'stillness in motion', the quiet mind in activity or finding the 'zone' for optimal performance.

Training also requires balance in clarity and compassion - not to be so soft as to be unclear as this creates worry and confusion which interferes with the horse's sense of security, but also no firmer than necessary; always aim to be softer and lighter. The emotional pressure when moving faster than one ideally would like creates far less of a disruptive imbalance than the trauma of being under handled with no pressure and then sudden having to deal with severe restraint if vet care or something similar is urgently needed. Better to focus on giving the unhandled horse the time and attention it needs to become balanced as a priority so it can safely be handled to receive any care it may require.

the guidelines and ideologies outlined from master horse men and scientific research. There is much value in bringing yourself and your horse's individual spirit to training through being truly present and to create space for a natural spontaneity within flexible and trusted training guidelines and objectives. Rather than simply following someone else's choreography or prescriptions with little understanding.

And lastly, we need to find balance in the equine industry as a whole. In response to the harshness of many training methods we are currently seeing, there are many different approaches arising and resurfacing aiming to be kinder

“We need to balance our goals while honouring the essence of the horse, always working with their permission”

SPIRITUAL

Spirit may be a vague term that will mean different things to different people, but we can all agree that there is something more to the horse than simply their physical and emotional body that draws us to them. This part is often overlooked and sometimes destroyed in training. We need to balance our goals while honouring the essence of the horse, always working with their permission.

and fairer to the horse, but unfortunately many seem to be in competition with each other. Balance will come from collaboration with the inclusion of multiple sources and perspectives, not with competition amongst those with common goals. We need strategy for change because, as with horses, applying force to get people to change their minds will only lead to resistance. We need to find a way to balance the opposing forces to achieve a healthy equilibrium that aims to put the horse's needs first in thought. 🐾

We also need to balance our essence, feel and intuition with

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The scale of BALANCE in the Equine Diet

Equine nutrition is a multifaceted field that demands a delicate balance of various nutrients to support the health and performance of the horse. Achieving equilibrium in the equine diet is essential for maintaining overall wellbeing and preventing health issues.

MINERAL RATIOS

Central to equine nutrition is maintaining the correct balance of minerals. Among these, calcium and phosphorus stand out as crucial for skeletal health and development. The ideal calcium-to-phosphorus ratio in the equine diet ranges from 1:1 to 2:1. Deviations from this ratio can lead to skeletal abnormalities such as developmental orthopedic diseases. Additionally, other mineral ratios, including copper, zinc, and iron, play pivotal roles in various physiological functions. Copper and zinc are essential for hoof health and immune function, while iron is necessary for oxygen transport in the blood. Imbalances in these minerals can disrupt overall health and performance. For instance, an excess of iron can interfere with the absorption of other minerals, therefore leading to deficiencies.

“Regular monitoring and adjustment of the diet ...are essential to maintaining equilibrium.”

FORAGE SELECTION

Forage forms the foundation of the equine diet, providing essential nutrients such as fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals. The selection of forage plays a significant role in achieving nutritional balance. Legume hays, such as lucern, are rich in protein, calcium, and other minerals, making them ideal choices for horses with higher nutrient requirements. Conversely, grass hays offer a more balanced nutritional profile and are suitable for horses with lower energy needs. Moreover, the quality of forage is equally critical in maintaining equilibrium in the equine diet. Factors such as maturity at harvest, species composition, and storage conditions can significantly affect nutrient content. Regular testing of forage samples can help horse owners make informed decisions about supplementation and dietary adjustments to ensure optimal nutrition.

SUPPLEMENTATION

While forage should be the primary source of nutrients for horses, supplementation may be necessary to fill nutritional gaps or meet increased demands. However, supplementation should be approached cautiously to avoid disrupting the delicate balance of nutrients in the equine diet. It is advisable to consult with a qualified equine nutritionist to determine the appropriate supplement and correct dosage.

THE IMPACT OF IMBALANCES

Deficiencies or excesses of certain minerals can lead to a range of health issues, including metabolic disorders, musculoskeletal problems, and compromised immune function. Additionally, imbalances in energy intake versus expenditure can result in weight gain or loss. Regular monitoring and adjustment of diet based on individual requirements and changing circumstances (environmental stressors) are essential to maintaining equilibrium and promoting optimal health and well-being. By paying attention to mineral ratios, selecting high-quality forage, and judiciously supplementing when necessary, horse owners can ensure that their equine companions receive the nutrients they need to thrive. While it is easy to ensure the food bought in a bag contains the correct ratio for ideal health and wellbeing, owners and managers need to be aware of how the nutritional content of roughage and grazing can affect these balances and subsequent health and behaviour of their horses. 🍎



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Lymph and longevity

THE EQUINE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM IS CLOSELY LINKED WITH THE HORSE'S CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM AND IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE FOR THE HORSE'S WELLBEING

The horse has two systems of elimination that drain excess fluid in the body, one being the venous system, that removes deoxygenated blood, the other is the lymphatic system that drains larger molecules.

In the venous system arteries take blood from the heart to the cells, blood travels through small arterioles to the capillaries where it gets pushed through the interstitial (spaces between cells, tissue and organs of the body) fluid. The lymphatic system consists of nodes and vessels that transport lymph around the body and filter the interstitial fluid around cells. Lymph nodes create lymphocytes (immune cells) which filter out foreign substances and play a vital role in supporting the immune system.

THE EQUINE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

The horse's lymphatic system is involved in the immune system response.

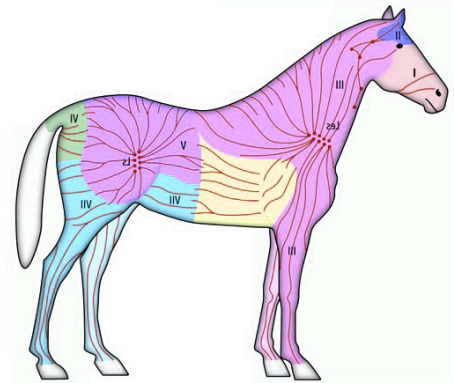
It has 4 main functions:

- It collects and transports fluid through the body
- It maintains the volume of the blood as well as the health of the interstitium and connective tissue
- It supports the return of plasma protein to the blood (protein circulation)
- It maintains fluid balance as well as the volume of the blood in the body.

KEY DIFFERENCES IN THE HORSE VS HUMAN LYMPHATIC SYSTEMS

The equine and human lymphatic systems have significant differences. A human has around 600 lymph nodes, whereas a horse has around 8000, almost 13 times more!

Horses have a significantly reduced number of smooth muscle cells compared to the human body. In the horse, 40% of the collector lymph vessels consist of elastic fibres, and the movement of lymph happens like a compressive bandage system. General consensus is that due to the lack of muscles in the lower limbs, this 'pump' mechanism assists in the movement of fluid. Taking the pump mechanism into account, it is clear that movement is key for activation of this system. It also means that an immobile horse, a horse that is stabled or confined for long periods, has a significantly reduced rate in lymph transportation in the body. When there is too much fluid left in the interstitium, oedema (swelling) occurs which is commonly seen in the limbs of static horses, as soon as they are out moving, this disappears and improves. Studies have shown that compression/elastic bandages don't really provide relief for the oedema as they just move the fluid in the limb, giving the appearance of the swelling being reduced. When it comes to horses, movement is key for a healthy functional body.



“The equine and human lymphatic systems have significant differences. A human has around 600 lymph nodes, whereas a horse has around 8000, almost 13 times more.”

The lymphatic system of the horse plays a very important role in their overall health. If there is an issue in the lymphatic system it could lead to inflammatory conditions in the lymph, that could cause severe swelling, which would need veterinary intervention.

LYMPHANGITIS SYMPTOMS

Lymphangitis is inflammation of low-pressure vessels similar to veins that collect the fluid that surrounds cells and return it to the bloodstream. Lymphangitis occurs when lymph glands are swollen due to an infection. The white blood cells become increased in the lymph nodes. If the lymph nodes are swollen, horses may also show signs of being lethargic, not eating, loss of appetite, fever, swallowing may become difficult, nasal discharge, coughing, tenderness or swelling of the area, lameness or stiffness. The lymph nodes can also stay swollen after the infection is gone and this could mean that there might be a systemic issue or pathology (disease or medical condition).

THREE TYPES OF LYMPHANGITIS

ULCERATIVE

This is caused by a certain bacterium which enters the skin through a wound, insect bites, or coming in contact with contaminated soil, tack or grooming equipment.

EPIZOOTIC

is caused by fungus and affects the lower limbs.

SPORADIC

Also called 'Monday morning leg' which causes swollen hindlimbs.

Should you suspect your horse has equine lymphangitis it is important to refer to a veterinarian for proper diagnosis.

THE ROLE OF THE OSTEOPATH

Osteopaths use a combination of different techniques to work on and address the musculoskeletal system. They address problems in the bones, joints, muscles, nerves, blood and lymph transport and stemming from the spine.

For the body to be healthy we need the lymph to flow. The founding father of osteopathy, AT Still, said "the rule of the artery is supreme",

this means that if there is no flow then dysfunction sets in. Osteopathy can assist lymphatic drainage in restoring freedom in the tissue and natural flow to the body. It can help to maintain the horse's lymphatic system, aiding in lymphatic drainage, and restoring flow to the body. Proper care, maintenance, regular check-ups and attention to abnormalities can help to ensure that your horse has a long, healthy and active life.



*Observing the
balance of*
**GIVE &
TAKE**

*IT IS IMPORTANT TO
ALWAYS GIVE THE SAME
AMOUNT OF DEDICATION
AND EFFORT THAT OUR
EQUINE PARTNERS GIVE
US, WHERE DOES RIDER
FITNESS COME IN?*

While much emphasis is placed on the horse's physical condition and training, the role of the rider's fitness is often overlooked. However, a rider's fitness level plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining equilibrium between horse and rider.

Each discipline requires a different level of skill, technique, and thinking, however, the point of communication and contact remains the same. Communication is primarily through our bodies, specifically through the touch of hands and seat. Everything about riding and competing and working with horses is a form of fitness. A rising trot is seen an extensive form of a squat, the squeeze of the knees in a half-halt, and even the lifting of your body out of the saddle for the jump to landing in your heels afterward are all examples of strength training.

The type of fitness that I am referring to is not going for a jog once or twice a week and "Bob's your uncle" we've done our part for our horse. Whilst 30 minutes of cardio twice a week should always be included into any training regimen the physiological fact of the matter is that we simply cannot build up the type of muscle that we need by running once or twice, we need more.

The type of training that every equestrian needs to add to their training regimen is strength-based training.

As we ride with our whole body, we need to focus on training which almost seems impossible with a busy life. To highlight on a few areas that we need to focus on - we need to, at bare minimum, be training our core as much as possible as this is the base of everything that we do in the saddle. This helps us to have a good posture. Having a good posture in the saddle helps to take pressure off the horse's back as slouching causes the rider to be much heavier than they are.

The next focus point is on building stronger muscles in our lower body, which includes upper and lower legs as well as the glutes (the bum). Working on a strong lower leg in the gym makes all the difference when riding, no matter what the discipline. In dressage, the lower leg is the main contributor in giving aids for movement, the more complicated the movement, the stronger our leg need to be. Show jumpers spend more time raised in the saddle than seated, this is where more lower leg muscle development is required to help you balance. Let's not forget about those upper leg and glutes. As muscles cannot function without a support structure, having strong quads, hamstrings and glutes help support the lower legs as all lower body movements are initiated by these muscles. Having a strong leg in general helps with better aids and cues for your horse. An ideal training program should include cardio-based exercise on lesson days, strength on normal (or non) riding days, and taking Sunday's (usually show days) off for stretching and flexibility training.

One of the most important parts of any training regimen is having a healthy lifestyle. We expect our horses to have the best nutrition that works for them and their athletic performance but do not hold ourselves up to the same standards. As it is a partnership, it requires balance, hence what goes for one, should go for the other. A healthy lifestyle not only has physical benefits (such as a higher protein intake for building muscle), but

“Each discipline requires a different level of skill, technique, and thinking, however, the point of communication and contact remains the same.”

proper nutrition also assists us by giving us more sustained energy to accomplish day-to-day tasks. It also helps to maintain balance and equilibrium in both the emotional and psychological realms as well by increasing the production of dopamine and serotonin which are known more commonly as our “happy hormones” and decreasing the release of cortisol which is our stress hormone.

With the above mentioned in mind, the question that you may be asking is how does this benefit the horse? By increasing strength in the lower body, we can put legs on better and more consistently. For English disciplines, where the ability to maintain proper posture and alignment is the basis of all movements, having a strong core and back is required. For all disciplines having a firm and gentle hand is still one of the fundamental and important forms of communication.

Achieving equilibrium in horse riding requires a combination of physical fitness, mental focus, and harmonious partnership between rider and horse. While the importance of horse training and conditioning cannot be overstated, rider fitness plays a vital role in creating and sustaining balance in the saddle. By prioritizing core strength, balance, flexibility, endurance, and mental focus, riders can enhance their ability to communicate effectively with their horses, maintain proper alignment and posture and ultimately experience the joy of riding in perfect harmony. As riders invest in their own fitness, they unlock new levels of partnership and synergy with their equine companions, creating an experience that is truly transformative for both horse and rider alike. 🐾

ELITE ATHLETE TRAINING

An example of cutting edge fitness technology is Body20's Electro Muscle Stimulation (EMS) technology. It stimulates muscle contractions at a full body level rather than 1-2 muscle groups as you would in a gym.

EMS takes exercise back to its most basic form such as a simple squat or sit-up whilst stimulating the muscle at 100-200 times more. EMS training helps to improve overall core strength including correcting muscle

imbalances, which result in uneven weight distribution between the left and right sides of the body. A correct posture allows the even distribution of weight.

EMS not only has strength-based applications, but rehabilitative ones too. Specifically tailored programs can help the rider in so many ways. Training is taken back to basics with little to no weight, other than body weight - making it easy on the joints.

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