

Improve

*If you can't even do a sit-up, is there hope for you to develop a strong seat?
You bet!*

If you read "Watch Your Seat!" in the Fall/Winter issue of 2000, you may have wondered about your own ability to execute different seat positions. Certainly being able to use different seat positions while riding requires a degree of trunk strength and balance.



Rider is slouched and unbalanced, heels up, toes down.

Have a Ball!

THE PURPOSE of this article is to describe a number of trunk stretching exercises. In a future article we will describe trunk strengthening exercises.

These exercises can be adapted to suit your current level of trunk flexibility. We believe in "No Pain, Much Gain." In other words, if any of these exercises are painful to you, stop doing them! Or change them to suit your abilities.

One great benefit of the following exercises is that you perform them using a large exercise ball, which stretches your trunk muscles before you ride your horse. Exercise balls are available for purchase at many stores for about \$15 to \$30. You can perform all of the exercises described here in about 10 minutes.

For optimal gain, perform these exercises two or three times a week. It may take a few sessions until you reach the stretch demonstrated by our model. Also, it may take a few sessions before you gain your sense of balance on the ball and trust the ball to hold you. But these things come quickly to most riders.



"Feet on the dashboard" style of riding forces the rider's weight back on the horse's spine.

Grab your exercise ball and let's improve your seat!

Your Seat!

The Back Float

Targets spinal muscles - sit on ball, back straight.

Gently push with your feet until you are stretched out on the ball with your back in contact with the ball.

Reach over your head, with the end goal of placing your hands on the floor.

Stretch only until you feel light tension in your body.

Hold stretch for 30 seconds, while continuing to breathe.



Round the Clock

Targets hip flexors



Relax, then rotate hips to the right, keeping your shoulders level.



Push your hips back, keeping your upper body still. Shift your hips to the left to complete the rotation of the "clock". Rotate three times to the right, then repeat three



Sit on the ball, back straight.



Slowly round your back, pushing your navel towards your spine.

The Face Float

Targets stomach muscles - Kneel in front of the ball, gradually push yourself up and over the ball. Hug the ball to your chest to get a better stretch. Hold position for 30 seconds.



Tips for Success

LOOK EASY? It can be more of a challenge at first than you might think. Here are some inside tips to get you started.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth while doing these stretches. Think about breathing so deeply that you use your stomach muscles to push air in and out, like a bellows.

Maintain an even breathing pattern. Do not hold your breath.

Relax. Practice just sitting on the ball with your back straight, but in a neutral position. That is, your back should not be arched or braced. Keep your shoulders level, with neither shoulder held lower than the other. You can use a mirror to check your posture, or have a friend watch you.

Have fun! Put on your favorite music or TV show. Or even watch "How to" riding videos while doing these exercises.

Try the Round the Clock exercise while mounted on your horse at a halt. Soon you will be able to use your seat as an aid while the horse is moving.

Side Stretch

Targets Rib Cage - Basic Position. Kneel next to your ball



Stretched position, pushing with your outside leg, stretch up and over the ball, reaching over your head.



At the point of tension, hold the stretch for 30 seconds while continuing to breathe.

Repeat on both sides of your body.



Thigh Stretch

Targets the upper leg - Kneel next to the ball, place one leg behind you, and the other next to the ball. Place your arms in front of your body, over the ball. Keeping your shoulders square, push your hip toward the ground to get a stretch across your upper thigh behind you. Hold for 30 seconds, then repeat with opposite leg



This rider shows what we strive for - a good, elegant balanced seat in the saddle. A vertical line drawn from head to heel intersects the rider's head, shoulder, elbow, hip and heel. This is the proper balanced seat that allows the horse the most freedom of movement.

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