

Riding in Balance

We are all dreaming about it: our horses are full of energy, yet in perfect balance listening to our slightest request, we are riding them effortlessly and gracefully, appearing to the onlooker quiet and relaxed.

We think this ideal is only a beautiful dream, never attainable for regular riders and only left for a gifted few.

I want to tell you that this is not so! There is a way to learn the principles and laws that govern our bodies and the bodies of our horses. These laws and principles work for horses and riders of all shapes and sizes. When you learn how it works, you can apply this knowledge to any horse or rider. It is not magic or extremely difficult to understand. What you need most of all to succeed is genuine love for horses and humility to learn from them.

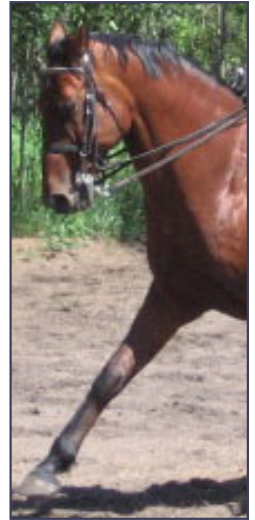
My journey to this understanding was long and full of questions that no one could answer. This was like making my way through a jungle. It was hard to see where to go next. The pieces of truth were rare and far apart. The clear path that I finally stumbled upon was made by **Mary Wanless**, a riding teacher from England that had the courage to look at riding from a different perspective. She calls her method **Riding With Your Mind**. Through years of painstaking research she came up with a clear and complete system of horse riding principles. It is mindboggling that no one before her put it all together.

I'm not suggesting that the system makes riding a piece of cake, far from that, but it showed me the clear path. It is now so much fun to move forward, to explore, to find solutions to everyday problems. Now I can take full responsibility for my actions on the horse and look at his responses as approval or disapproval of what I'm doing.

The horse is always right - this is an old saying from Renaissance Haute Ecole (high school). These words are so true! Day after day horses that I ride prove this to me and show me my place every time I stop listening to them.

If you share my passion for horses, for learning, have courage to open your mind, and have patience with yourself and your horse let's explore what makes us good riders. [Rider's Posture...](#)

Irina Yastrebova, Riding Instructor and Trainer.



Rider's Posture

Horses only do what we ask them to do. Horses do not know our agenda, or what it means to carry us in balance. The horse only reacts to our actions, our weight and our balance.

In the TV reality series "Amazing Race" contestants had to ride horses in Argentina. A woman didn't know how to ride and was swaying all over the place in the saddle. Her horse tried to catch her, moving under her left and right, which of course unseated this woman so badly she started falling, caught her horse with reins, and caused him to rear. The woman fell down and everybody thought that the horse was acting up. This is an extreme case of a horse's reaction to our lack of balance. However, to some extent, this happens to all of us. We lose our balance, we give confusing aids, we use reins to keep us in the saddle and we expect our horses to deal with all that and to figure out what we want. The most amazing thing is that horses do figure out what we ask them to do. Unfortunately for them, they do this very well leaving us to believe that we are in control and know what we are doing.

I don't like the phrase "to sit" when I talk about rider on a horse. To sit is to relax, to give up your weight and balance. This is the last thing you want to do on a horse - to give up your balance, to become loose and floppy. We are not passengers on our horses. We do not relax and follow their movement. In this partnership, we must play a leading role.

A horse can give us a movement, an energy but we have to shape the movement, we have to direct the energy.

Consider these important facts about a **rider's posture**:

Alignment - Good posture either on the ground or on the horse starts with a good alignment. A vertical line dropped down from the ear goes through the shoulder, hip and heel. The shoulders are relaxed and down, the pelvis is in a neutral (vertical) position, and the legs are under us. Click [here](#) for more detailed explanation and pictures.

Abdomen - We often hear that riders should relax and absorb the movement of their horses through the middle. Read [these facts](#) and decide for yourself if this is a correct way to approach riding.

Hip Joints - Most of the horse's movement must be absorbed by our hip joints. If the hips are locked, all the movements of the horse's back get transferred to our spine. Click [here](#) for details.

Thighs - There is almost no talk about the role of the thighs in riding. Few fragments of information here and there. The only exception is Mary Wanless' "Ride With Your Mind" approach. The way of using our thighs in riding was my biggest discovery of all. After I understood that concept everything else just fell into place by itself. Click [here](#) for a complete story.

Muscle Imbalance - We all have it. It begins with the position of fetus in the womb and continues through out our life (right/left handedness, habits, active or sedentary life style, posture etc.). When you know your imbalances, you can work toward minimizing their effects on your riding. [Read more...](#)

Exercises - You need to work with your body off the horse to be able to create enough flexibility and strength in the joints and muscles to support balance during the movement. Without that it is very hard to correctly influence your horse. Start [here](#).

Irina Yastrebova, Riding Instructor and Trainer.

Alignment

Photo 1. Good posture either on the ground or on the horse starts with a good alignment. A vertical line dropped down from the ear goes through the shoulder, hip and heel. The shoulders are relaxed and down, the pelvis is in a neutral (vertical) position, and the legs are under us. When the body is in good alignment, we need a minimum effort to stay or sit upright. Because we have to keep our balance on the moving horse (which is a task in itself), we do not want to do any extra work.

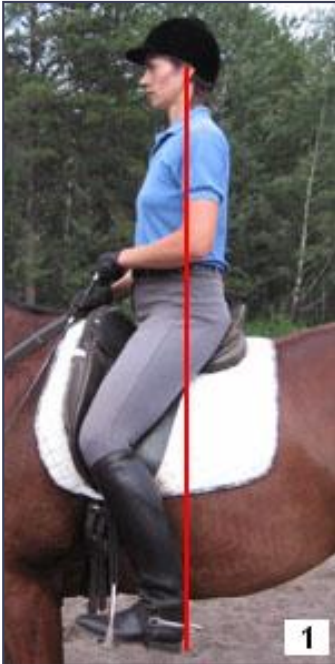


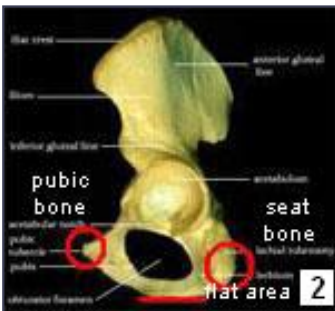
Photo 2. Pelvis should be in a neutral (vertical) position. If you look at the bottom part of the pelvis, there is a flattened area between the front (pubic bone) and back (seatbones) parts. It has a boat-like shape. When we are in a saddle and the saddle fits us well, we sit on this flattened part of the pelvis. A well-fitted saddle is very important. Look how the bottom of the pelvic bone rises slightly in front, very much like our saddles do.

Photo 3. A chair seat is a very common mistake. It starts with the pelvis rotated backwards. As a result, the rider sits mostly on the back part of the pelvis, on the seatbones. If you like to round your lower back and rotate your pelvis backwards when you sit in a chair, you are likely to have that problem in the saddle.

Photo 4. A fork seat is another common mistake. It starts with the pelvis rotated forward. The rider sits mostly on the front of the pelvis (pubic bone). If you like to rotate your pelvis forward and arch your lower back when you sit (this is especially common in women) you may sit that way on a horse.

Both of these situations create instability, discomfort and extra muscle work to keep you upright and in the saddle.

Maintaining the neutral position of a pelvic bone is not as easy as it sounds. Click [here](#) for exercises which will teach you to recognize the neutral position. To stabilize the pelvis in the neutral position on the ground or on a moving horse you will need [core \(abdominal\) strength](#).



To keep our own balance we have to have a base of support under our center of gravity. Imagine you are sitting on the edge of a hard chair ready to stand up at any moment. Where would your feet be, in front of you or under you? Likewise, to be balanced on the horse you need to have your feet under you. You may argue that the saddle is your base of support and you do not need your legs under you. The saddle is moving and is not a very good base of support. If you stick your legs too much forward you will be completely at the mercy of your horse's movement, like a dead weight. If you put them too much back you will simply topple forward and sit on your crotch (which is uncomfortable by itself), and again at the mercy of your horse's movement. Having the legs under you is also necessary to efficiently use thigh muscles during riding. I explain this on the [Thighs](#) page.



Be careful not to push into the stirrups, it will inevitably bring your lower leg forward and you into a chair seat. Do not actively lower your heels because you will lock your ankle joints and push the legs forward even if you are trying not to.

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Abdomen



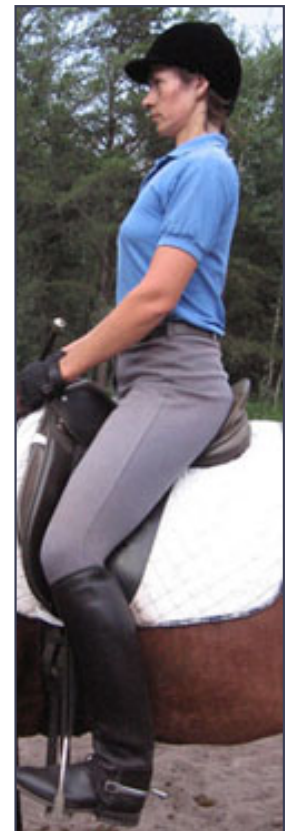
If you look at how people carry themselves you will start noticing lots of rounded shoulders, hunched backs, dropped abdomens, and rotated pelvises. If we walk and sit like that the whole day there is no way we will be able to change our posture for one hour in the saddle.

Look at the photos above. **Photo 1** is a correct posture. Spine is in a good alignment, pelvis is in a neutral position, and the abdomen is firm. In photos 2 and 3, I have completely relaxed my stomach muscles. That sagged my spine down and made it easy to round my shoulders and to push my pelvis in any direction I wanted. In **Photo 2** my pelvis is rotated backward. In **Photo 3** my pelvis is rotated forward. I had a very unpleasant sensation in my lower back after assuming those postures. I measured my height, and I found out that I was 2 inches taller in the good posture!

To improve your posture, first of all you will need to focus your attention on the abdomen area. If we look at the torso part of the human skeleton (see picture below), we cannot help but notice the emptiness between the ribcage and the pelvis. This emptiness contains the abdominal cavity filled with internal organs (intestines, liver, stomach etc). These organs weigh approximately 11 kg (24 pounds) and contain mostly water (~98%). Fat deposits will create extra weight. All this weight is inside of a muscle sack. The walls of the sack are formed by abdominal muscles. The top is your diaphragm, and the bottom is the pelvic floor.

Let's imagine that you have to carry around 24 pounds of water. Would you put it in a balloon or in a jug? Which one is more stable and easier to carry? Not a difficult question to answer. The balloon swivels and has a lot of inertia - very hard to move from place to place compare to the jug. When you ride a sitting trot with weak abdominal muscles it is like you have a balloon filled with water right in the middle of your torso. The inertia of your internal organs produces sheer forces that wreck your lumbar spine (lower back, where most of the back problems exists). Firming the abdominal muscles is like replacing this balloon with a jug. Our abdomen has to be firm and stable in order to ride safely and in balance.

Do not pull your stomach in trying to achieve the firmness in your abdomen. It would be like pressing on one side of the balloon and pushing all the liquid content to the side. In the human body, the internal organs would be pushed up into the diaphragm and would create a feeling of weakness and emptiness in the middle. Try it! Look at the photo to the right. I'm pulling my stomach in and trying to lift my chest at the same time. Looks familiar, doesn't it! Many riders are working on achieving that. At that moment on my horse I have felt so weak and tense. I felt that my upper body was separated from my lower body and could sway around on its own accord.



To create real firmness, we have to learn to breathe with our diaphragm and to engage deep abdominal muscles. These muscles are called Transversus Abdominis (TA) and their fibers lay horizontally. They envelop our middle like a corset. A sedentary way of life makes the deep muscles idle. They do not engage as they should. We use these muscles

without noticing while coughing, grunting, and laughing. When they are properly active, these muscles can stay engaged at about 30% of their maximum strength for hours without tiring. A nice tool to have, isn't it?

When these muscles are engaged, they squeeze the liquid content of our abdomen. Since liquid cannot change its volume, it becomes pressurized and pushes from inside. I call this an **Abdominal Push**. Look at the red arrows in the picture on the left. This pressure supports your ribcage, connects your upper body to your lower body and makes it a one stable unit.

First you need to learn how to breathe with your diaphragm. Click [here](#) for a series of exercises to develop diaphragmatic breathing. Then you can start working on your abdominal push. Click [here](#) for a series of exercises to activate your deep abdominal muscles.

Irina Yastrebova, Riding Instructor and Trainer.



Hip Joints



Hip joints have a ball and socket structure, which means they can move 360 degrees. However, they are not equally mobile in all directions and often stiff muscles shorten the range of motion even more. In order for the hip joints to absorb the horse's movement, they need to stay in the position where they are able to move in any direction with ease. If riders put themselves in an incorrect position, their hips may reach the limit of their range of motion. In this case, they will not absorb the horse's movement correctly.

There are two common mistakes that limit the hip joint movements.

1. **An attempt to lengthen the stirrups.** We can only move our leg backwards about 10 degrees. Anything more will include movement of the pelvis and spine. If we have tight hip flexor muscles we will not be able to create even these 10 degrees.

When you sit in the saddle and try to lengthen your stirrups in order to achieve nice long legs, you may extend your hip joint to the limit. Your legs will no longer be capable of moving backwards. If your flexor muscles are tight they will rotate your pelvis forward and put you on the crotch (Ouch!).



2. **Legs rotated outwards.** People very often rotate their thighs outwards when they are in the saddle. They look at sitting in the saddle as a relaxation and letting go. On the round horse, a relaxed leg naturally rotates out. The thighs rotated outwards limit the range of motion in our hips in the outward direction. If you stand up and try to rotate your whole leg (not just your foot) outward you will notice that it doesn't go far. On the horse, our legs spread apart and tight adductors (muscles on the inner thigh) will add to the stiffness. Locking the hip in this direction prevents backward movements of the pelvis. It also puts the adductors in a position where it is easy to grip the saddle, which will further lock your hip joints. The thighs are no longer flat on the saddle, the knees are not pointing forward, the toes turned away from the horse and if we have spurs on they will constantly hurt the horse.

Click [here](#) for a series of exercises to develop your hip flexibility.

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Thighs

Our thighs create a frame around the horse. They can shape the movement and control the energy.

The thighs can do their job correctly only if:

- They are in the correct position.
- The torso is stabilized with internal abdominal pressure.
- The rider can feel what is going on under his/her thighs and pelvis instead of focusing on the hands and horse's head.

Correct thigh position



In the correct thigh position the thighs are fully rotated inward from the hip joint. Almost as much as when we are on the ground (see the picture on the left). When we sit in the saddle and relax our legs, they fall outward from the hips. Next time you ride, look down at your thighs, relax them completely and notice how they immediately rotate outwards even on a still horse. They rotate even more when the horse moves. **To keep your thigh rotated in, you must engage your thigh muscles** (See [more about thigh muscles](#)). If your adductors (inner thigh muscles) are tight, you may not be able to rotate your thighs in enough, especially on a wide horse. This happens because adductors do not only squeeze our legs together, but also rotate our legs outwards. When they are tight, they lock your thighs in an outward position and do not let them rotate inward. In this case, you need [stretching exercises](#) off the horse so that you could begin to put your thighs in the correct position. It takes time and patience.

When a thigh is rotated enough it lays flat. Both knee and toe point forward. Compare the pictures above, noticing the difference in the position of the hip, knee and ankle joints.



Firm muscles under the seatbones

The next step is to engage muscles under your seat bones. Mary Wanless calls that "pinching", meaning that you think of pinching the saddle with your seat bones. Another way to understand this is to think of lifting your seatbones up from the saddle without any tilt or rotation.

Engaging these muscles will achieve quietness of the hips and pelvis in the saddle. You will only move as much as your horse and no more. You will get a feeling that you are glued to the saddle, and that there is no more swaying and slashing around. Try it on a hard chair. Sit on it with your back straight, be relaxed and make an attempt to move your chair back and forth with your legs (don't seat on a moveable chair). You will get a feeling that your seatbones are sliding back and forth on top of the muscles, while the muscles do not move against the chair. Then tighten the muscles under your seatbones and try to move your chair. Feel the difference! The seatbones no longer move and you can almost take your chair with you. Do it in front of a mirror. Position yourself so you can see your legs from the side. Observe the difference. When my students first experience this feeling on a horse they say: "Oh! I'm connected to the saddle!"

Another benefit that comes from engaging the muscles under your seatbones is that the firmness spreads to the outside of your thighs. The outside thigh muscles (abductors) lift your thighs away from the saddle. This helps you avoid gripping the horse with your knees while using your inner muscles to direct your horse.

I have yet to see a person who rotates the thighs too much inside, however, you can overdo the firmness under your seatbones. Especially men, who, naturally, have more toned muscles.

Keep your horse between your leg's aids

Familiar saying, isn't it. However, if you think only of your lower leg you are missing a big piece of a puzzle. You need to keep your horse between your entire legs, thighs too. Don't let your horse push his ribcage sideways and slide away from under you. Compare it with your horse being a river and your thighs being the banks. If the banks are not firm the water will spill sideways. The same thing happens with the horse. If your thighs are soft and floppy the horse will push through them and spill all the energy sideways.

Regulate the horse's energy by creating an active barrier that directs him where you want him to go. If, for example, on a left turn, your horse is falling right use your right thigh and actively push your knee into him saying: "That direction is closed for you, move your body left." If, to turn your horse, you only pull on the left

rein, he will use that rein to hang onto you and pull even more right.

Use your thighs to regulate forward energy

For me, this was the most difficult and most revolutionary idea that I have learned. That was the breakthrough that the Mary Wanless' book and video series helped me the most. It took me a while to understand the idea and then start applying it. The main muscle to engage is rectus femoris (front of the thigh).

We can use our thighs to slow our horse down, to half-halt him, to send his energy up, to do a flying change, to collect his trot or canter etc.

Before you can control and direct your horse's energy you need to create it with your lower leg.

I have found 2 different ways to explain the correct work of the thighs.

- I often show this to my students by stabilizing their lower leg with my hands while they are in the saddle and asking them to think of unbending their knee without actually moving any part of the leg. Then, when my students ride, I ask them to become firm in the middle, rotate their thighs even more inward, engage muscles under seatbones and recreate the feeling of unbending their knees without moving the legs. When they are able to do all that at once, I ask them to close their fists without pulling backwards. Their horse slows down or even stops and they look at me with such a surprise and excitement in their eyes.
- Another way is to do that off the horse. Stand with our feet slightly apart and knees bent. Put your hands on the front of your thighs. Jump forward, not much, a couple feet, and upon landing stop your forward momentum instantly. Feel how your thigh muscles under your hands become firm. That is because they have stopped your forward progression. We need this kind of action of our thigh muscles in the saddle.

You need to create a balance between the front and back of your thigh muscles. You need to learn to engage the back of your thigh too. Using only front of your thighs will lift you up from the saddle. When you firm muscles under your seatbones, spread that firmness down the back of your thigh. Think of pressing your thigh down into the saddle. Do not confuse this with stepping into the stirrup, which will inevitably create an opposite effect. When you succeed in balancing these two forces you will get a feeling that your horse hangs from your seat and totally at your will.

When you understand these concepts, this will only be a beginning of your exploration of all the nuances and intricacies, all the situations and possibilities in riding. From my own experience, I must tell you my riding has never been so exciting as it is now! I feel incredible reverence to Mary Wanless' ability of looking past all that equestrian "established" ways of teaching and unearthing the real diamond.

Irina Yastrebova, Riding Instructor and Trainer.

Muscle Imbalances

Muscle imbalances are very difficult to recognize. We do things in a certain way over and over again. We feel very comfortable. This comfort doesn't let us see our crookedness and unevenness.

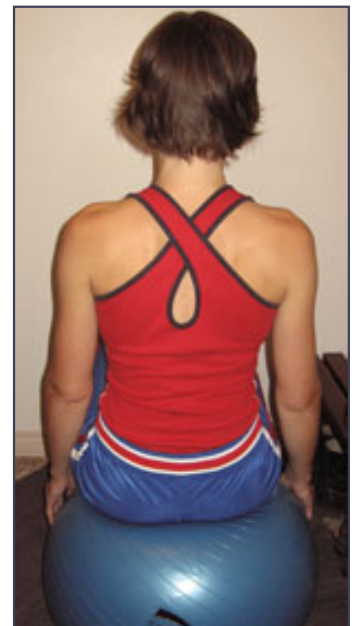
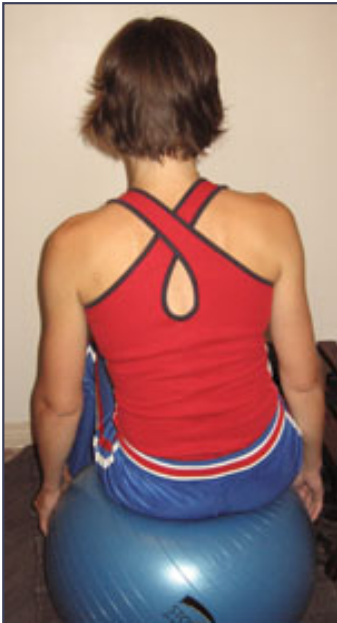
I will try to show you my muscle imbalances as an example. I will explain how I can see them. This example may help you to explore your own imbalances.

Let me start with the fact that I am a right-handed person. This means I usually use my right hand to take things, open doors, throw a ball, etc. I also use my right leg to kick a ball. All these activities require my right side to be very active and mobile, while my left side is very stable and grounded.

Imbalance in my hip extensors

My left buttocks and hamstrings are stronger than my right ones. Their job is to ground me.

Because my left buttocks and hamstrings are so strong they ground my left seatbone into the saddle like a rock when I ride. My right seatbone almost floats above the saddle (look at the picture to the left). My saddle pad used to get wet only under my left side and stayed dry under my right! To even the pressure out, I have to consciously engage my right buttocks and hamstrings and think of pressing my right thigh down into the saddle. Now I'm finally starting to get it right. My horses feel straighter and more vertical under me (look at the picture to the right).



Imbalance in my hip flexors

On the front of our thighs we have a **very important muscle**, rectus femoris. Its job is to extend the knee and flex the hip at the same time. In a rising trot, this muscle lifts you up from the saddle and regulates your descend. Unfortunately, its strength may be different in the left and right legs. For example, my preference to kick a ball with my right leg made my right rectus femoris stronger than my left. Therefore, it can lift my right seatbone out of the saddle even if I don't want to. This imbalance adds to the previous problem with the uneven weight distribution.

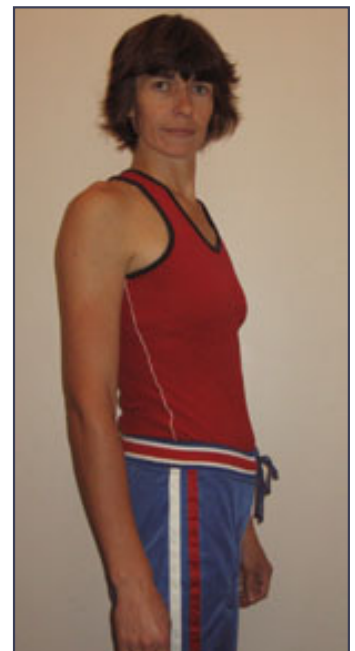
Imbalance in the position of my pelvis

My pelvis is not parallel to the front plane of my body. It is twisted. My right hip is always pushed forward. My left leg is rotated more inward than my right one. My left tensor fascia lata (the muscle that rotates the thigh inward) is shorter than my right one. Even though, it's shorter, it doesn't need to work hard because my thigh stays rotated inward naturally. Therefore, it doesn't get enough work out, and it is weak. When I started doing exercises for this muscle, I couldn't even engage it.

If I want to look left I rotate my pelvis to the left and then the rest of my body follows. My body does not twist at all. All the twist is in my legs and hips. This motion is very easy (look at the picture to the left). If I want to look right I don't move my pelvis. All the twisting is happening in the middle of my body between my rib cage and my pelvis (look at the picture to the right). This turn is harder for me. This made my right external oblique abdominal muscles stronger than my left ones.

Compensating for these imbalances in the saddle.

- I consciously keep my right seatbone back and down by engaging my hamstrings and muscles under my right seatbone. This helps to ground my right side.
- Due to my crooked pelvis and the heavy left seatbone, my tendency is to slip to the right. To counteract this, I push my left seatbone forward by rotating my left thigh inward. This centers me over the saddle.



- When I ride circles to the left I have to be careful not to open my shoulders toward inside. I also need to keep my right seatbone down. I have problems with the connection on the outside rein because the right side of my body wants to advance too much. I sometimes think of opening my shoulders to the right to stop that.
- When I ride circles to the right, I have to push my right seatbone back. Otherwise my horse falls inward. I push my right thigh down. To bend my horse to the right, I must feel that my whole right leg is vertical like a pillar.
- I must use these corrections with any dressage exercise such as shoulder-in, travers, renvers, half-pass, flying changes, pirouettes etc. The difficulty of the movement adds to the complexity of necessary corrections.

I will never be able to make myself completely symmetrical. However, I can work toward minimizing my imbalances. I do [stretching exercises](#) and [strengthening exercises](#). I pay attention to how I ride and to my horse's reactions. I observe my habits and change them.

If you are a right-handed person do not assume you will have the same imbalances that I have. There are other factors, such as legs of different length, scoliosis, job-related muscle development, habits, etc. They all can influence your unevenness. Left-handed people are generally less asymmetrical because they live in the world where most things are set up for the right-handed people and they have to cope with that.

When you start working on your imbalances, you need to realize that your body will not give up without a fight. It wants to do things in the comfortable and familiar ways. Many times your body will fool you and make you think you are doing it right while in reality you are not. The changes will not come fast and be subtle and hard to see. Prepare to be patient and consistent. Most importantly, listen to your horse. He will tell you when you are wrong and when you are right.

Irina Yastrebova, Riding Instructor and Trainer.

Exercises

When I have started doing these exercises, I found their great benefit for riding and now I continue using them as my fitness routine. I developed this system using Yoga, Pilates and Physio Ball. I have tried to create a logical progression from simple to difficult ones.

Always make sure to proceed slowly with new exercises and stop if you feel discomfort or pain. If you have any health issues check with your doctor to make sure that these exercises are safe for you.

Correct Breathing is good for your health and vital for riding. This series of exercises will help you recognize and then develop diaphragm breathing.

Pelvis Control is necessary to recognize your alignment in the saddle and to be able to move your pelvis independently of your shoulders or legs.

Core Strength exercises will help you create stability and connect your ribcage to your lower body.

Hip Flexibility is very important to control your horse's movement exactly as you need. Without it, there will be unevenness and lack of balance.

Thigh exercises will let you feel how different thigh muscles work (hip flexors and extensors).

Thigh exercises II will let you feel how different thigh muscles work (hip adductors, abductors and rotators).

Exercises in the Saddle will let you find a correct position in the saddle and explore your muscle imbalances.

Exercises must be done correctly in order to be safe and beneficial. I have inserted caution notes throughout the exercise pages. Please, take them seriously.

Always finish the work out with stretching exercises. The [Hip Flexibility page](#) provides a good variety to choose from.

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Pelvis Control

Some of the exercises on this page do not have suggestions on how many repetitions you should do, because they are more for developing your feel and you can do them as much as you feel comfortable.

1. Back/Forward Pelvis Movements on a Physio Ball.

Sit on the physio ball sideways to the mirror. Sit straight, don't slouch. Put your legs slightly apart with a 90 degree angle in the knees. Now looking at yourself in the mirror roll your pelvis forward and backward, slowly, stopping in the middle (neutral) position. Notice which position is most comfortable for you and which one reminds you of your position in the saddle. Check if you want to move your shoulders when your pelvis moves. If you do, work on separating the pelvis movements from your upper body.

2. Side-to-Side Pelvis Movements on a Physio Ball.

Same position as for the first exercise, only in front of the mirror. Move the ball to the right and then to the left in a slow controlled way. Watch yourself in the mirror, you will see your left and right hips go up and down. See if you have excess up and down movement in your shoulders. Try to limit it as much as you can. Which direction do you lose your balance easily? If you have an uneven loading in your seatbones you will be tempted to slide off. For example, if your left seatbone is a heavy one, you will feel like it is very easy to move your ball to the right. The ball will practically move itself, sliding to the right from under you. To the left, it will be easy to control the ball movement. Work on your control and balance.

3. Standing Pelvis Movements.

This exercise will not only help you with pelvis control, but, if done correctly, it will strengthen the muscles around your hip joints. Stand in front of the mirror, hold on with your left hand to something (door way, wall etc.), tighten muscles in your left leg and lift your right hip joint together with the pelvis. Your right leg being attached to the pelvis will go sideways and up about 10-20 degrees. Make sure that your left leg is firm and straight and doesn't deviate or collapse to the left. Make sure you are lifting not just the leg, but the pelvis too. For that, put your right hand on your waist area and feel a bone with the bottom of your hand. Try to push this bone up into your hand. Change legs. Repeat 5-10 times on each side going slowly up and down and do 2-3 series.

4. Pelvis Movements on the Floor.

- Lay on your back, bend your knees and put your feet on the floor parallel and slightly apart. Put your hands on your stomach. Lift your buttocks up and then lower them down. Notice that you did it with your Gluteus muscles (buttock muscles). Try to do the same with your stomach muscles. It is very hard at the beginning. The Gluteus muscles are better and stronger at lifting your buttocks, and they want to jump in. Repeat 5-10 times going slowly up and down and do 2-3 series.
- Next, arch your back and feel your pelvis rotating forward. Bring it back.

If you have lower back problems be careful with arching your back. Either don't do it at all or do it very slowly, just to feel the beginning of the rotation.

- Next movement is to lift your left hip, hold, put it down, then lift your right hip, hold, and put it down. This one, too, can be done with the Gluteus muscles or stomach muscles. Try it both ways, notice the difference. Be careful to keep the rest of your body quiet and don't move the shoulders when you lift your hips. Again, observe, which side is easier to do and with what muscles (buttocks or stomach). Is there a difference in how far you can lift your left and right sides? Repeat twice more on the weaker side. Repeat 5-10 times on each side going slowly up and down and do 2-3 series.
- Now comes the interesting part. After you have mastered all previous exercises, try to roll your pelvis all the way around its perimeter. You can do it clockwise or counterclockwise. You can also do a figure 8 - it is like lifting your hips in a circular motion one after another very smoothly. It is only possible if you have learned how to lift your hips with your stomach muscles.

Irina Yastrebova, Riding Instructor and Trainer.

Correct Breathing

1. Abdominal Breathing

Probably everyone has heard about this one. You lay on your back and inhale air into your stomach. **Your belly will rise on inhale and fall down on exhale.** Breathe evenly and slowly. If you are unfamiliar with such breathing, monitor yourself carefully, otherwise, you may not notice and switch to raising your belly on exhale and sucking it in on inhale - the typical chest breather way. This exercise is easy because nothing prevents your diaphragm from pushing down into your stomach.

2. Breathing laying on your belly.

Lay down on your stomach, put your head on your hands or a very flat pillow and inhale air into your stomach. It is not hard to do correctly because your chest is pressed down to the floor and it is hard to raise it. What will start rising and falling with your breath is your buttocks and hips. Now the diaphragm is pushing down into your stomach with each breath and your stomach wall cannot rise because it is pressed to the floor, internal pressure will lift your lower back and your buttocks. This kind of breathing is more work for your diaphragm muscle and therefore will strengthen it.

3. Breathing with the shoulders raised.

Lay on your stomach, put your hands along your body, your legs together. The muscles in your legs must all be toned, especially your buttocks. Then lift your head and shoulders from the floor by muscular effort of your back not by pushing with your hands. Now breathe into your belly. Much harder, isn't it? Your diaphragm muscle has to push into your internal organs so hard it will lift your whole upper body into the air. You will rise and fall with each breath. Rise on inhale, fall on exhale. Do it evenly and slowly to really see the effects. This is hard work for the diaphragm muscle. If you are unfamiliar with such exercises start with 5-10 breaths, do 3 series. A more advanced variant is raising your legs and shoulders at the same time, like in the prone boat posture (Yoga).

It is very important to tone muscles in your legs for this exercise, and buttocks in particular. That will stabilize your pelvis and will help you avoid unnecessary pressure in your lower back.

These exercises are preparation work for developing a habit of correct breathing and training your diaphragm (same as you would train any other muscle in your body). When you ride your abdominal muscles hold your internal organs under pressure. Your diaphragm has to push into them and flare your lower ribs to create room for the lungs to expand. If it is not strong enough you will start breathing into your upper chest. Such shallow breathing will create tension and anxiety. It also weakens connection between the lower and upper body.

The next step in your training consists of [the exercises for abdominal strength](#). These exercises will further strengthen your diaphragm muscle.

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Core Strength

Following exercises emphasize creation of **Abdominal Push**, engaging your inner abdominal muscles and creating inner pressure in your stomach, other abdominal muscles will work too.

1. One Leg Extension

Lay down on your back, knees bent, feet slightly apart. Put your arms on your stomach. Raise your head slightly off the floor. Create abdominal push by either grunting when you exhale, or coughing lightly (you do not need a lot of it otherwise it is hard to breathe). Exhale and inhale couple times into your stomach feeling with your hands that you keep firmness even when you inhale. Lift and straighten one leg up in the air at 45-60 degree angle. Notice how weight of your leg tries to twist your pelvis and abdominal muscles stabilize it.

Really pay attention that your pelvis lay flat on the floor and does not move.

Put first leg down and lift another one. Keep breathing into your stomach. Alternate your legs always waiting for one to come back to the ground before you lift another one. Repeat 10 times on each leg and do 2-3 series resting in between.

2. Bicycle Extension

When you feel that first exercise is easy you can start lifting other leg before first one came to the ground. Make a bicycle moves with your legs.

Keep them quite high about 60-70 degrees, lowering your legs create intense force that will try to destabilize your pelvis and if your abdominal muscles not ready for that your pelvis will rotate forward and create dangerous pressure in your spine.

Only lower your legs when you feel ready for it. The main purpose of this exercise is learning to engage **Transversus Abdominis (TA)** muscles (inner muscles of your abdomen), keep them engaged and breathe at the same time. It is more important that you can do this exercise longer then stronger. At the beginning do it for 5-6 breaths, then rest then another 5-6 breaths. When you become stronger you can continue doing it until you feel you are getting tired, keep breathing into your stomach evenly and deeply, don't hold your breath.

Variant: Later, you can add degree of difficulty. During bicycling you can lean your legs left, come back to the center and then lean them right, not much 10-20 degrees, your pelvis should lay flat and should not rise on any side. You will start to feel that you have one side weaker than another, work on the weaker side more.

3. Reversed Sit-up

Seat on the floor, legs together, bend your knees and stabilize your feet either under sofa, or ask someone to hold them. Seat close to your legs, back straight and arms folded in front. Create internal abdominal pressure as in previous exercises, exhale and slowly lower your whole body (from the hips) down just a little bit, 5-15 degrees, bring it back on inhale, keep your back straight.

Do not arch your lower back. If you only lower your upper body you have failed to create the abdominal push.

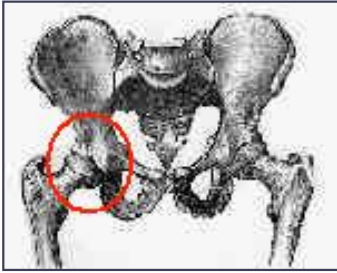
Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series. As before, lowering your body faster is less important than doing more repetitions. Women can do this exercise without stabilizing their feet, because their lower body is heavier then upper body.

These exercises have a positive side effect. You start losing your belly fat (trust me, I did).

Note to women: I do not recommend performing these exercises during your period.

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Hip Flexibility



These exercises develop mobility and range of motion in the hip joint - a connection between your leg and pelvis. Some of them are good for strengthening the muscles surrounding your hip joint. You can move your leg relative to the pelvis, or your pelvis relative to the leg. You do not need to do them all. Choose one or two from each sector that appeal to you.

1. All around stretch

Make sure the surface of your floor is not slippery. Stand in front of the mirror, feet parallel to each other, legs straight and apart. Do not spread your legs until it hurts, only to the feeling of the stretch in your hip joints. Mildly engage all muscles in your legs to feel really sturdy. Keep your pelvis in a [neutral position](#). Breathe evenly and hold this stretch for 30 seconds. Now start pushing your left hip forward and your

right hip back. Do this slowly. Watch yourself in the mirror. Keep your hips level and legs straight and toned. You will not be able to push a lot, so do not try to go beyond the mild stretch feeling. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds. Do the same in the opposite direction. Observe in which direction you have more range of motion. Hold longer for the stiffer side. For someone who knows Yoga, the triangle poses, angle poses and lunge poses are good exercises to stretch the hip joints. All of the above stretches have a benefit of strengthening ligaments and muscles around the hip joint.

When you stretch any joint you have to strengthen surrounding muscles too. Otherwise, it will become very mobile and weak, predisposed for a trauma.

2. Hip Extensors Stretches

- **Hamstrings (back of your thigh) stretch (a)** - You can use any table or other piece of furniture sturdy enough to put your leg on. Do not use anything too tall, otherwise you will not be able to keep your leg straight. Stand in front of it, put your leg on the top and keep it straight. Keep your standing leg taut and lean forward from the hips. Keep your back straight. When you feel a mild stretch hold it for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other leg, hold longer for the stiffer leg.
- **Hamstrings stretch (b)** - Stand straight, feet just slightly apart. Engage your leg muscles. Create an [abdominal push](#) in your core and bend down from the hips. Do not worry if you didn't go very far down. Do not try to reach down with your arms. Instead of trying to pull your arms and shoulders down, try to pull your pelvis down, which requires activating the hip flexors. It is hard at the beginning to really feel them, but with practice you will get better. What we are doing here is using our body weight to stretch the hamstrings. Hold for 30 seconds while breathing into your stomach.

Do not lose abdominal push, otherwise this stretch can create stress in your lower back.

- **Hamstrings stretch (c)** - Sit on the floor with your back and legs straight, legs together. If your hamstrings are short you will not be able to keep your back straight. In this case, choose another, more comfortable, stretch for the time being. Engage the front of your thighs to keep your knees straight and lean forward from the hips. Do not try to reach your toes with your hands, really concentrate on bending from the hips (same thing as with the standing hamstring stretch). Hold for 30 seconds, while breathing into your stomach. Notice that with each exhale you can go down a little bit more.
- **Buttocks stretch** - Lay on your back, bring your knees toward your chest and pull them down with your hands as much as you can. Keep your pelvis on the floor, otherwise it will move up with the legs and causes you to lose the stretch. Child's and pigeon Yoga poses and deep squats are also very good buttocks stretches.

2. Hip Flexors Stretches

- **Modified Bridge** - Lay on your back, bend your knees, and put your feet slightly apart. Raise your hips in the air by squeezing your buttocks and engaging back muscles. Lift as far as they go. Squeeze as much as you can with your buttocks. Hold this position as long as you can, building up to 30 seconds. Repeat several times. If you are familiar with Yoga, a full bridge is also a good stretching exercise for hip flexors.
- **Cobra** - Lay on your stomach, legs slightly apart, hands by your shoulders. Engage all of your leg muscles, especially buttocks. Create a light abdominal push. Breathe into your stomach and slowly raise your head and shoulders using your back muscles at first, then arms. Do not hang your upper body between your arms. Instead, engage the muscles around your shoulders to keep the shoulders down and the body up and tall. Hold for several breaths. Slowly lower yourself down controlling the movement with your back muscles.

Keep the abdominal push and the buttocks engaged all the time. Otherwise, your lower back will arch more than it should and may sustain injury.

- **Upward-facing dog** - Start the same way as in **Cobra**. The only difference is that your hands are beside your chest, not beside your shoulders. After you have raised your shoulders you continue to push upwards

with your arms until the pelvis starts raising off the floor. Hold for several breaths.

3. Adductor (inner thigh muscles) Stretches

- **Adductor stretch (a)** - Sit on the floor with your back straight. Bend your knees, open them and let your feet meet sole to sole. Put your elbows on your thighs (not knees!) and push down. At the same time, try to engage your buttocks as much as possible to aid with the stretch. Hold for 30 seconds. If your adductors are very short, it will be hard to sit in this position. In this case, lay down on your back. Bend your knees, grab them with your hands and pull them apart as much as you can. Hold for 30 seconds.
- **Adductor stretch (b)** - Sit on the floor with your back straight. Put your legs apart and keep them straight. This exercise can be challenging for someone with short hamstrings (back of your thigh). In this case, use the previous exercises until you lengthen your hamstrings. Keeping your back straight, lean forward from the hips. Watch out for the possibility of bending in the middle of your back. If you do you will lose the purpose of the exercise. When you start feeling a mild stretch hold it for 30 seconds.

3. Hip Rotator Stretches

Twist - This exercise is one of my favorites. I have discovered that it is great for stretching the hip joint, especially small muscles inside your hip. Sit with your back and legs straight. Bend your right leg and put your right foot outside the left leg. With your left hand grab your right leg. Hold it and try to pull your right hip joint backwards. You will immediately feel the stretch in your hip. Hold for 30 seconds, repeat on the other side. Hold longer on the stiffer side.

Rotators stretch - Sit on the hard chair - back straight, feet on the ground, legs bent 90 degrees in the knees. Put your right ankle on your left thigh, somewhere behind your left knee. Start leaning slowly forward from the hips, keeping your back straight. When you feel a moderate stretch, hold it for 30 seconds. Switch legs. Hold longer for the stiffer leg.

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Strengthening your Thigh Muscles

Exercises for the thigh muscles usually target more than one particular muscle group. Remember, during these exercises, always breathe evenly [using your diaphragm](#) but not your upper chest.

1. Hip Extensors (hamstrings)

- **Hamstrings workout** - You will need a physioball for this exercise. Lay down on your stomach, legs together. Put a physioball behind your buttocks on top of your thighs. Bend your knees to secure the ball. Press your heels down into the ball trying to bend your knees even more. Release without taking your legs away from the ball. This is a pure hamstrings exercise. Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
- **Modified Bridge** - Lay down on your back, bend your knees, and put your feet **together**. Engage your buttocks and hamstrings then raise your hips in the air until your body and your thighs make a straight line. You can keep your buttocks engaged to work both hamstrings and buttocks. Or, you can try to relax your buttocks to some extent. This will work the hamstrings more.
First variant: Lift and lower your hips. Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
Second variant: Hold the hips lifted as long as you can, building up to 30 seconds. Lower your hips and relax. Repeat a few times.
- **Modified Bridge with the Ball (feet on the ball)** - This exercise is not easy and requires core stability. You will need a physioball for this exercise. Lay on your back. Bend your knees and put your feet on the top of the ball. Put your arms on the floor at 45 degree angle to your body, palms down, elbows extended. Press your arms down. Raise your hips in the air by squeezing your buttocks and engaging hamstrings and the back muscles. Your hamstrings will work very hard to stabilize the ball. Do not let the ball slide away from you.
First variant: Lift and lower your hips. Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
Second variant: Hold the hips lifted as long as you can, building up to 30 seconds. Breathe evenly. Lower your hips and relax. Repeat a few times.
Third variant (the most difficult): Keep your hips lifted. Extend the knees, rolling the ball away from you. Then bend them back, rolling the ball back. Keep the movement slow and controlled and do not lose the ball. Repeat 5-10 times and do 2-3 series resting in between.

2. Hip Extensors (buttocks)

- **Prone buttocks exercises** - Lay on your stomach, arms by your sides and legs slightly apart and bent in the knees. Lift your right leg by squeezing your right buttock. You will be able to lift it only a little bit, but this is sufficient. If you try to lift higher you will start lifting your pelvis off the floor and engaging the back muscles. Hold your leg up in the air for a moment and bring it back slowly. Alternate right and left legs. Repeat 10 times on each leg and do 2-3 series resting in between.
Variant: Lift both legs and keep them lifted as long as you can, building up to 30 seconds. Breathe evenly. Lower your legs and relax. Repeat a few times. This exercise is a pure buttocks workout.
- **Standing leg extensions** - Stand by the wall or a tall furniture and use it for support. Engage thigh muscles in your left leg to stabilize yourself. Extend your right leg backward and sideways. Be careful not to go very far backwards, otherwise you will start arching your spine. Hold your leg extended for a moment, and bring it back slowly. Repeat 10 times on each leg and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
- **Modified Bridge with the Ball (shoulders on the ball)** - You will need a physioball for this exercise. Sit on the floor with your back straight and resting against the ball, and your legs bent. There should be around 30 cm (12 inches) between your feet. Create an [abdominal push](#), engage your buttocks and lift your hips off the floor until your body and your thighs create a horizontal line. The ball will be between your shoulder blades. You will have to keep your head in line with your body. You can have the ball closer to your head for the neck support. Lower yourself down slowly.

If you feel discomfort or pain in your neck consult your physician before continuing with the exercise.

Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.

3. Hip Flexors (Rectus Femoris and Iliopsoas).

Rectus Femoris is a superficial muscle located on the front of your thighs. Iliopsoas are the deep muscles located to the sides and slightly above of the pubic area.

[Exercises for the core strength](#) are good exercises for the hip flexors. When you stretch the hamstrings, you should learn to engage your hip flexors for better results. For an explanation, see [Hip Flexibility](#).

- **Reversed Sit-up** - Sit on the floor, legs together, and bend your knees. Either stabilize your feet under a sofa, or ask someone to hold them. Sit close to your legs, back straight and arms folded in front. Create an [abdominal push](#), exhale and slowly lower your torso (from the hips) down just a little bit, 5-15 degrees.

Bring it back on the inhale. Keep your back straight all the time.

Do not arch your lower back. If you only lower your upper body you have failed to create the abdominal push.

Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series. Lowering your body further is less important than doing more repetitions. Women can do this exercise without stabilizing their feet, because their lower body is heavier than upper body. This exercise is working the iliopsoas very hard.

- **Clock Exercise** - Kneel on the floor/mat. Keep your body upright with the trunk and thighs in a vertical line. Either put your arms by your side, or fold them in front of you or behind your head. Create an abdominal push and lean backwards from your knees a few degrees. You should not arch your back. Your body, from the head to the knees, should form a straight line at all times. Come back to the vertical position. To create more work for the rectus femoris muscle make sure you do not engage your buttocks. Move slowly and in control. Lean backwards only as far as you can handle comfortably. Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.

If you feel discomfort or pain in your neck, back or knees consult your physician before continuing with the exercise.

- **Rider's Posture** - Stand sideways to the tall mirror and in front of a wall or a solid piece of furniture. Put your feet parallel to each other and at the shoulder width. Now, look into the mirror, keep your body vertical and bend your knees. Your knees must go down and forward and come in contact with the wall in front of you. Put some weight into that contact. Look in the mirror. You will see yourself in the posture of a rider. Note that your pelvis is in a neutral position and you can draw a vertical line through your ear, shoulder, hip and heel. Still watching yourself in the mirror, keep your knees against the wall, your torso vertical, and move your body down and backwards by slightly bending your knees. Come back up and forward with your body. This exercise mainly works the rectus femoris muscle. Repeat 10-15 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between. At first, move slowly and in control. When you get better, increase the speed without losing the control.

If you feel any discomfort or pain in the knees consult your physician before continuing with the exercise.

- **Modified Bridge (using your upper thighs)** - Lay on your back, bend your knees, and put your feet slightly apart. Push your feet down and start unbending your knees. This will lift your thighs into the air and your body will follow. Do not engage your buttocks. Keep your body and thighs in line, and do not arch your back.
First variant: Lift and lower your hips. Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
Second variant: Hold the hips lifted as long as you can, building up to 30 seconds. Repeat a few times, resting in between.

4. Combined Exercise

To combine a workout for hip extensors and upper thighs, use the previous exercise - Modified Bridge. In that position you can use two different methods to lift your hips. You can either engage your upper thighs, or you can use your buttocks and hamstrings.

First variant: Move your hips up and down alternating these methods.

Second variant: Hold the hips lifted and switch between these two muscles groups without lowering your hips.

Click [here](#) for exercises on abductors, adductors and thigh rotators.

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Strengthening your Thigh Muscles II

1. Hip Abductors (Gluteus Medius and Minimus)

To locate these muscles place your hands on the right and left sides of your body where your legs are attached. Your hands are covering the muscles we will target. If you do not know exactly where to put your hands lift your leg sideways. You are looking for the place just above a border between your body and your moving leg.

- **Standing Leg Lifting** - Stand by the wall or a piece of tall furniture and use it for support. Engage the muscles in your left leg and put all of your weight on it. Lift your right leg sideways. Your body and your leg should create about 45 degree angle. Keep the leg straight and make sure your toe is pointing forward. Do not rotate your leg in any direction. Bring it down. Lift and lower the leg in a controlled fashion, be careful not to create a momentum in the movement of your leg. Repeat 10 times with each leg and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
- **Leg Lifting on the Floor** - Lay down on the floor, on your left side. Prop yourself up on the elbow. Bend your left knee to create a 90 degree angle in your leg, and at the same time bend your left thigh to create a 90 degree angle with your body. Keep your right leg straight, toe pointing forward and start lifting the right leg up and down, slowly, in a controlled fashion. Do not lift your leg very high. About 20 degrees from the floor is enough. Lower your leg all the way down to the floor, or as much as your muscles let you. Repeat 10 times with each leg and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
Variant: You can bend the leg you are lifting and keep it bent during the entire exercise.

2. Hip Adductors (Inner thigh muscles)

Hip adductors are necessary to create stability in your thighs and to be able to direct your horse. They are not for gripping your saddle!

- **Squeezing the Ball** - You will need a physioball for this exercise. Sit on the edge of a hard chair. Place the ball on the floor between your thighs. Squeeze it with your thighs. Relax your thighs and let the ball regain its shape. Repeat 10 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
Variant: You can sit right on the floor with your knees bent and place the ball between your legs.
- **Leg Lifting on the Floor** - Lay down on the floor, on your left side. Prop yourself up on the elbow. Bend your right knee to create a 90 degree angle in your leg and at the same time bend your thigh to create a 90 degree angle with your body. Keep your left leg straight, toe pointing forward and start lifting the left leg up and down, slowly, in a controlled fashion. Do not lift very high. 10-20 degrees from the floor is enough. Repeat 10 times on each leg and do 2-3 series, resting in between.
- **The Ball Lift** - You will need a physioball for this exercise. Lay down on your back. Bend your knees. Place the ball on the floor between your legs. Squeeze it slightly with your thighs. Create an **abdominal push**. Exhale and start to peel your buttocks off the floor by using your abdominal muscles. Then peel your spine off too. If you are flexible enough you can bring the ball all the way to your head. If you can lift your buttocks only be satisfied with that. When your abdominal strength and your flexibility increases you will be able to go further. Inhale and slowly lower the ball. Repeat 5 times and do 2-3 series, resting in between.

Make sure your lower spine stays flat at the initial phase of the lift and in the last moment of lowering the ball. If you create a strong abdominal push it will.

This exercise combines a workout for adductors and lower abdominal muscles. Plus it stretches your spine.

3. Hip Rotators (Tensor Fasciae Latae)

To locate these muscles place your hands on the front of your hips.

- **Standing Isometric Rotation** - Stand on a non-slippery surface (carpet works fine) with your legs slightly wider than shoulder width, feet parallel to each other, and toes pointing forward. Put your hands on the front of your hips. Without actually moving your legs try to rotate them inward. Try to rotate the whole leg as a unit from the hip. Your heels should press down and outward. You will feel muscle tension under your hands. Hold this tension for 30 seconds, then relax. Do 2-3 series, resting in between.
- **Leg Rotation on the Floor** - Lay down on the floor, on your left side. Prop yourself up on the left elbow. Bend your knees to create a 90 degree angle in your legs. Lift your right leg into the air, not much, about 10-20 degrees. Your right calf should be parallel to the floor. Start rotating your thigh inward, slowly, in a controlled fashion. Your thigh and your knee should not change their position in the air, they only rotate in place. However, your calf and your foot will move up. You will not be able to rotate a lot. Even if you have very strong hip rotators and very flexible hips, you will not be able to lift your calf more than 45 degrees. Rotate back to the starting position. This exercise works not only the rotators, but the abductors too. To intensify the workout, wear ankle weights or heavy shoes. Repeat 5-10 times with each leg and do 2-3 series, resting in between.

Always finish the work out with stretching exercises. The [Hip Flexibility page](#) provides a good variety to chose from.

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Exercises in the Saddle

While doing exercises in the saddle pay attention to your horse's reactions. If you are not sure what your horse may do then have someone walk him or keep you on the lunge line during the exercises.

1. Working muscles under the seatbones

First, work on the exercise off the horse. Sit on a hard chair. Legs slightly apart and keep your back straight. Do not lean back and do not round your back. Make sure your pelvis is in a **neutral position**. Imagine that you want to pinch your chair seat with your seatbones. Muscles that you sit on will engage and you will get a feeling of lift from underneath. Hold for a few seconds, then relax. You may find that, in the beginning, engaging muscles under your seatbones is very hard to accomplish. The engagement is weak and indistinguishable. Do not give up. Work on it any time you have a chance and you will get better.

After a few times in the chair try it on a horse. It will be hard to focus on the exercise and to ride at the same time. Work on it during warm-up or cool-down walk, or during walk brakes on the long rein. Make sure your thighs are **rotated inwards** and your pelvis is in a neutral position. Try to engage muscles under the seatbone in the same way you did in the chair. At first, you will have to focus very hard, but when you get better your muscles will stay engaged without your constant attention.

Variant: To better understand why you need to have these muscles engaged, switch between tightening them and relaxing completely. Observe, how wobble and unstable you become when everything is relaxed. On the other hand, when muscles under the seatbones are working they create a feeling of stability and connection to the saddle. They should not be tight as a rock. However, complete relaxation will create instability.

2. Leg-lifting in the saddle

Do this exercise during the walk on the long rein. Make sure your thighs are **rotated inwards** and your pelvis is in a neutral position. Try to lift your legs directly sideways and up without losing rotation. Do not rotate your thighs outwards. Make sure, nothing else is moving. Do not arch your back, or tuck in your pelvis. Believe me, this is very hard. For the first time, you may not be able to lift them at all. If this happens, simply engage your muscles without actual movement. Once you get the correct motion, lift and relax the legs several times while your horse is walking.

Variant: Try to combine this exercise with the previous one. Engage muscles under the seatbones and lift your legs at the same time.

3. Sliding left and right in the saddle

Do this exercise during the walk on the long rein. Drop your stirrups. Make sure your thighs are rotated inwards and your pelvis is in a neutral position. Slide a little bit to the right. Now, using your left thigh bring yourself back into the center. Now slide to the left and use your right thigh to bring you back. Pay attention not to do any extra movements. If your thighs are weak you will start wreathing in the saddle trying to bring yourself back. If that is the case, slide to one side just a little bit. Observe, which direction is easier to slide to and which direction it is easier to come back from. Repeat several times on each side.

4. Upper body rotation in the saddle

Do this exercise during the walk on the long rein. Make sure your thighs are rotated inwards and your pelvis is in a neutral position. Rotate your whole body, including your hips, to the right. You will get a feeling of pushing your right hip backwards and your left hip forward, use your thighs to help you with the rotation. Come back to face forward and then rotate to the left. Observe the moment when your hips can no longer rotate and your upper body still can: how much more can you rotate your upper body after your hips stop? You will see there is a difference between the left and right sides of your body. You may realize that it is easier to rotate the hips in one direction, but the upper body doesn't go very far after the hips stop moving. When you rotate in the other direction, it is hard to rotate the hips, but the upper body turns easily. Work twice as long on the parts which are reluctant to move. Repeat several times.

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