Quick Tip Two - Riding with a Neutral Pelvis

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11/12/2012

Riding with a Neutral Pelvis Part 1 - What is Neutral? - A favorite motto of mine is "Pelvis' First." I believe that if you do not have your pelvis in its most mechanically correct position (or neutral), you will not be able to ride to your full potential. In order to explain what a neutral pelvis is, you have to have a basic understanding of the area's anatomy.

Your pelvis is comprised of three bones that act as one. These three bones are connected with cartilage (SI joints) which creates pliability and flexibility within the structure. Your two hip joints and the joint at the end of your spine connect your pelvis to the rest of your body. (Please note that all of this anatomy is much more complex, but this simple version is just fine for our discussion.)

The concept of neutral in my brain pertains to the mechanics of joints. We are going to use the idea of a pendulum to think about this concept. Neutral is the place where the pendulum hangs when no force is applied to it, and when it moves equally to the right and left when force is applied to it. This scenario mimics a well functioning joint. If the tendons, ligaments and muscles that surround the joint are working properly, the joint will be working in neutral. In other words, in neutral the joint is poised to be able to move in all the directions it is capable of and has the ability to do so. In order for the pelvis to be in neutral, all three joints that surround it must work in neutral (2 hips and sacro-lumbar). If any or all of the three joints are compromised (can't get to its neutral or do not have equal range of motion side to side), the pelvis will be torqued, twisted or rotated and your ability to move with your horse will be jeopardized.

An uneven pelvis, (i.e. one not in neutral) can show up in a variety of equitation faults – one shoulder higher that the other, uneven stirrups, leaning to one side or the other, one leg turned out, etc. The list is endless. Check out next week's tip to learn how to determine if your pelvis is in neutral or not.

Riding with a Neutral Pelvis Part 2 – Is Your Pelvis in Neutral?

So last week, we discussed how a pelvis not in neutral impacts our ability to ride to the best of our ability. So how do you figure out how out of whack your pelvis actually is? (There are very, very few people who are completely biomechanically correct, everyone has some crookedness somewhere.) There are two places to look. In order to make these assessments, you need to have a couple of body landmarks identified on your pelvis. One of them is your public bone and the other two are the bony protrusions at the top of each hip bone on the front of your body. To be in neutral, all three of these landmarks will lie on a plane perpendicular to the ground (if you are sitting or standing). If this plane is not perpendicular to the ground (either with the top going forward or back) you have a pelvic tilt. If one

of your hip protrusions is more forward that the other the other you have a pelvic torque. You can also have both. If you have any of these conditions your pelvis is unbalanced and it is affecting your riding. Fear not, you do have the ability to unravel your imperfectly positioned pelvis. It is not cast in stone, even though it probably feels like! Next week we will continue to explore MORE possible imbalances of the pelvis. (See why your pelvis is so important?) And I promise we will soon discuss simple ways to find better balance within your pelvis structure.

Riding with a Neutral Pelvis Part 3 - Unbalanced Movement within the Pelvis

Although the pelvis is very stable, there is a small amount of movement within the structure itself. This comes from the cartilage the binds the two side structures of the pelvis to the sacrum – the SI (Sacro-iliac) joints. Most people are not even conscious of their SI joints, but they are the structures that allow for your pelvis to flex in 3-D. Your horse's back moves in 3-D – side-to-side, to and fro and up and down. Your pelvis must be able to do the same in order for you to follow his motion.

Your SI joints act like the suspension of your car. If your suspension is too loose, your car will wobble all over and you will not have good control. If the suspension is too tight, you feel every little bump. And if you have loose suspension on one side and tight suspension on the other, it makes for a very interesting, uncomfortable ride. If you are going to have a problem with your SI joints, more than likely they are too tight or stuck. The best way to un-stick them is with a good chiropractor, although there are a couple of lower back stretching exercises that can help, all of which involve bringing one leg to the outside of the other.

The easiest way to explain this is to introduce an exercise. You will need a cavalleti or ground pole. Beginning at the end of the pole, stand with both feet to one side of the ground pole, let's say the right. Take your right foot up and over the cavalleti. You will now be standing with your left foot on the right side of the cavalleti and your right foot on the left side. Now pick up your left foot and walk it up and over the pole, landing on the right side of the pole. Continue in this fashion until you reach the end of the pole. You can then either do it backwards or turn around and do it all over again. This movement effectively stretches the area around your SI joints and improves your coordination at the same time. Next week we will add a few more pelvis balancing exercises to your repertoire.