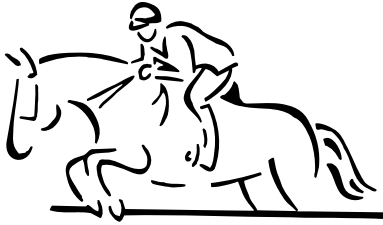


EQUINE REHAB AND THERAPY

Jeff Moore, ESMT

PO box 522, Joseph, OR 97846

541-377-7770 www.equinerehab.com or email at equinerehab@uci.net



Suppling/Coordination exercise w/ Cavaletti

Adapted from *Gymnastic Exercises for Horses the Classical Way*, Eleanor Russell

This is very good for suppling the horse, increasing concentration and working each leg independently. Start with one cavaletti on the ground at a walk and build up to seven. When the horse walks through this calmly, with head down, start to raise individual poles. The purpose is to vary both the height and the distance between them, requiring the horse to concentrate on how it moves its legs and where it needs to place them. This works on both the physical suppling and hones the proprioceptive response (the neurological system that tells a horse where he is in time and space, where his feet are and how to move the body to get where he needs to be).

- 1) Start with one pole on the ground, walk the horse over it, calmly with the head down, then build up to seven poles at the lowest height.
- 2) Raise the 4th pole to medium height (6-8") and walk the horse through 3-4 times
- 3) Raise the 2nd pole to med height and move the first pole 10 cm (4") closer to the 2nd
- 4) Walk through 3-4 times, or until the horse negotiates the course calmly with a lowered head.
- 5) Raise the 6th pole to med height and bring the 7th pole 10 cm closer to it. Repeat #4.
- 6) Raise the remaining cavalettis one at a time, walking the horse through them each time, that is raise the 5th, 3rd, 7th and the first, keeping the spacing the same.
- 7) With more experienced horses, repeat the above steps raising the poles from med height to maximum height.

This will require the horse to concentrate and consciously put out the effort to move his legs correctly. The fact that this movement is conscious and non-habitual helps the horse loosen his body and start to reprogram his movement. In horses as in people, compensatory patterns of movement get started (or 'hardwired') as a way of dealing with injury or pain and even when the pain is gone, the compensatory initiation of movement continues. A large part of a horse's brain is hardwired to coordinate his incredibly complex movements. To illustrate how difficult it is to canter over rough terrain with shifting weight on their back, scientists have found it extremely difficult to create a robot that can even trot on level ground, let alone canter, but it is very easy to create one that will follow a scent trail, bring back a stick or sound an alert (bark) when a human approaches. This cavaletti exercise starts to work on reprogramming these neural pathways.

Importance of working with neck low for suppling and back issues

Working your horse with the neck low allows the back to open, with the neck and nuchal ligament stretching the spine. This is the opposite of the head high, hollow frame that causes so many back issues. Scientists have found the proprioceptive nerves run outside the spinal cord along the back. When the back is braced and spasmed (hollow or inverted) it interferes with the transferring of information and affects coordination and athletic ability beyond just the physical restriction. This neck low frame also requires the building of the abdominal muscles, to support the horses' movement and it releases emotional sources of muscle tension. But it also subtly transfers weight forward on the horse and is counter indicated in horses that have front joint disease or tendonitis.