

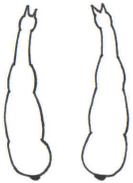
NATURAL ASYMMETRY

Every horse is naturally asymmetrical and this causes an uneven distribution of the weight over the four legs. When the rider does not recognize and correct this imbalance, this can lead to problems.

But what exactly does this natural asymmetry look like? Well the natural asymmetry can be divided into several areas:

- Lateral asymmetry
- Horizontal imbalance
- Front legs
- Hind legs
- Front-back ratio
- Diagonal imbalance
- Vertical imbalance
- Imbalance top-underline
- Mental, emotional, spiritual imbalance

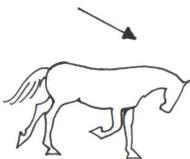
LATERAL ASYMMETRY



Every horse bends more easily to one side than to the other, for example more easy to the left. Then the horse has a hollow side on the left and a stretched side on the right.

Because of this lateral asymmetry your horse will be easy on one rein and difficult on the other. And you'll experience uneven contact on the reins because your horse is holding the bit on the stretched side and doesn't take contact on the hollow side. Another symptom is that you and your saddle slide to the stretched side.

HORIZONTAL IMBALANCE



The unequal weight distribution between front legs and hind legs is the second area and the so-called horizontal imbalance.

Naturally, all horses carry about 3/5th of their weight on the shoulders and 2/5th on the hind legs. You'll notice this horizontal imbalance when your horse is leaning on the reins while riding and is very heavy in your hand.

FRONT LEGS



The left- and right-handedness in the front legs is the third area of asymmetry.

Just like humans, horses are left- or right-handed. The weight on both front legs is not equally divided. Long-term this can lead to strain injuries in one front leg.

HIND LEGS



The left- and right-handedness in the hind legs is another dimension of natural asymmetry.

One hind leg usually is more pushing, the other one more carrying. The carrying hind leg is more supple and steps easily under the center of mass. The pushing hind leg is more stiff and can push the horse forward.

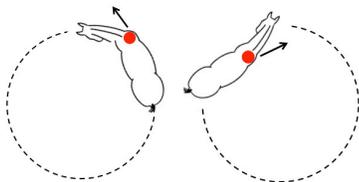
FRONT-BACK RATIO



Another area is the front-back ratio.

Naturally, the horse walks with his shoulders crooked in front of its hips. When the horse is not straightened along the wall of the arena, this effect is enhanced. This way the rider makes the asymmetry even worse.

DIAGONAL IMBALANCE



A horse that is not corrected in the previous areas of natural asymmetry will lean on the inside shoulder or on the outside shoulder. This is called the diagonal imbalance and it refers to the diagonal shift of the center of mass towards one shoulder.

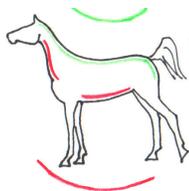
VERTICAL IMBALANCE



Vertical imbalance is another aspect of natural asymmetry.

The movement of the center of mass can make the horse move slightly sideward. And this can cause the horse to speed up automatically which is very inconvenient for the rider.

IMBALANCE TOP-UNDERLINE



If a rider does not correct all previous areas of asymmetry, this usually results in a bad posture and an incorrect use of abdominal muscles and back muscles. It causes an imbalance in the muscles in the topline and underline of the horse. This can lead to tension and back problems.

MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, SPIRITUAL IMBALANCE



Tension in the back leads often to stress and imbalance in the mind. A horse with a short topline is always 'ready to flee'. This makes these horses very alert. So tension in the back causes mental and emotional tension. And long term this affects the spirit and the well being of the horse.

Therefore It is important to reduce the natural asymmetry and imbalance. The solutions is straightness training because ST helps the horse to develop symmetrically in body and limbs.

6 KEYS OF STRAIGHTNESS TRAINING

Straightness training consists of 6 keys that allow the horse to develop his body and limbs symmetrically.

KEY #1: LATERAL BEND



The first key of straightness training is the lateral bending of the horse. With lateral bending, we mean the equal lateral bend of the spine. By stretching short muscles and contracting long, weak muscles, the horse can learn to bend laterally to both sides.

KEY #2: FORWARD-DOWN



The second key is the forward-down position of head and neck. By stretching the outside of the body during key #1, the back muscle on that side lengthens. And a long back muscle cannot keep the head of the horse up, causing the horse to lower his head into a forward-down position.

KEY #3: STEPPING UNDER



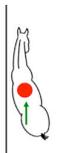
Correct lateral bending (key #1) engages the inside hip, causing the inside hind leg to step towards the center of mass. The forward-down position (key #2) of the horse allows the hind leg to swing forward. Correct stepping under is a requirement to be able to work on the next keys where we address the bending of the hind legs

KEY #4: BENDING OF THE INSIDE HIND LEG



When the horse can perform proper lateral bending, it is capable of stepping under the center of mass with its inside hind leg. Then, this hind leg can start to assume some of the weight from the front legs, making it bend more. This is done through the exercise shoulder-in.

KEY #5: BENDING OF THE OUTSIDE HIND LEG



The next key is to bend the hind leg as an outside hind leg. This is done through the exercise haunches-in. The outside hind leg steps under the center of mass, which causes it to bend. The haunches-in reduces the push of the outside hind leg and it stimulates the outside hind leg to carry weight.

KEY #6: BENDING OF BOTH HIND LEGS



When the horse has learned to bend his body and both hind legs individually, we can ask the horse to bend both hind legs simultaneously. We use the exercises pirouette and piaffe. A straight horse allows itself to be collected and lifted in the front.

The result of the six keys is a balanced and symmetrical horse. A straightened horse can bend to both sides, has equal shoulder freedom, pushes and carries equally with the hind legs and can carry more weight with the hind legs.

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