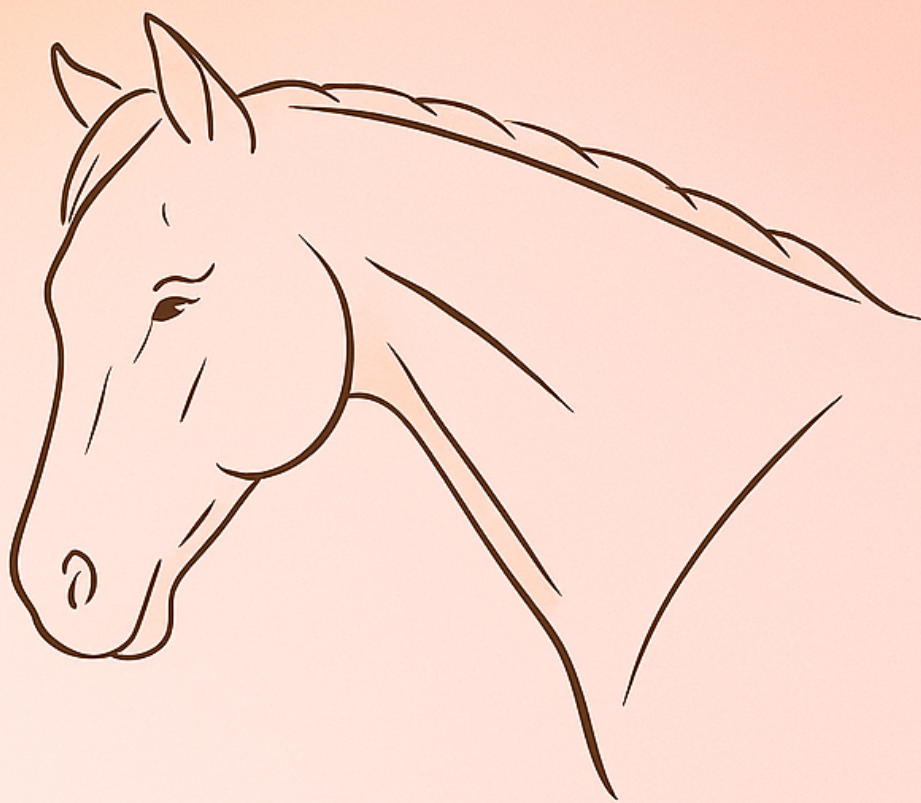


THORACIC SLING

Stretching & Strengthening Guide



Support Front-End Lift,
Balance & Posture

What is the Thoracic Sling?

The thoracic sling is a group of muscles and connective structures that suspend the horse's torso between the front limbs, acting like a supportive hammock. It includes the serratus ventralis, pectorals, trapezius, and other stabilizing muscles. A strong thoracic sling allows the horse to lift the withers, move freely in the shoulders, and carry weight more evenly - crucial for soundness and performance.

When to Support the Thoracic Sling

This guide is ideal for horses who:

- Appear "dropped" in the withers or heavy on the forehand
- Brace through the shoulders or neck under saddle
- Show poor front-end lift or shoulder freedom
- Have saddle fit issues related to posture or scapula motion
- Need topline or core rebuilding after injury or time off

Red Flags - When to Pause and Consult a Vet

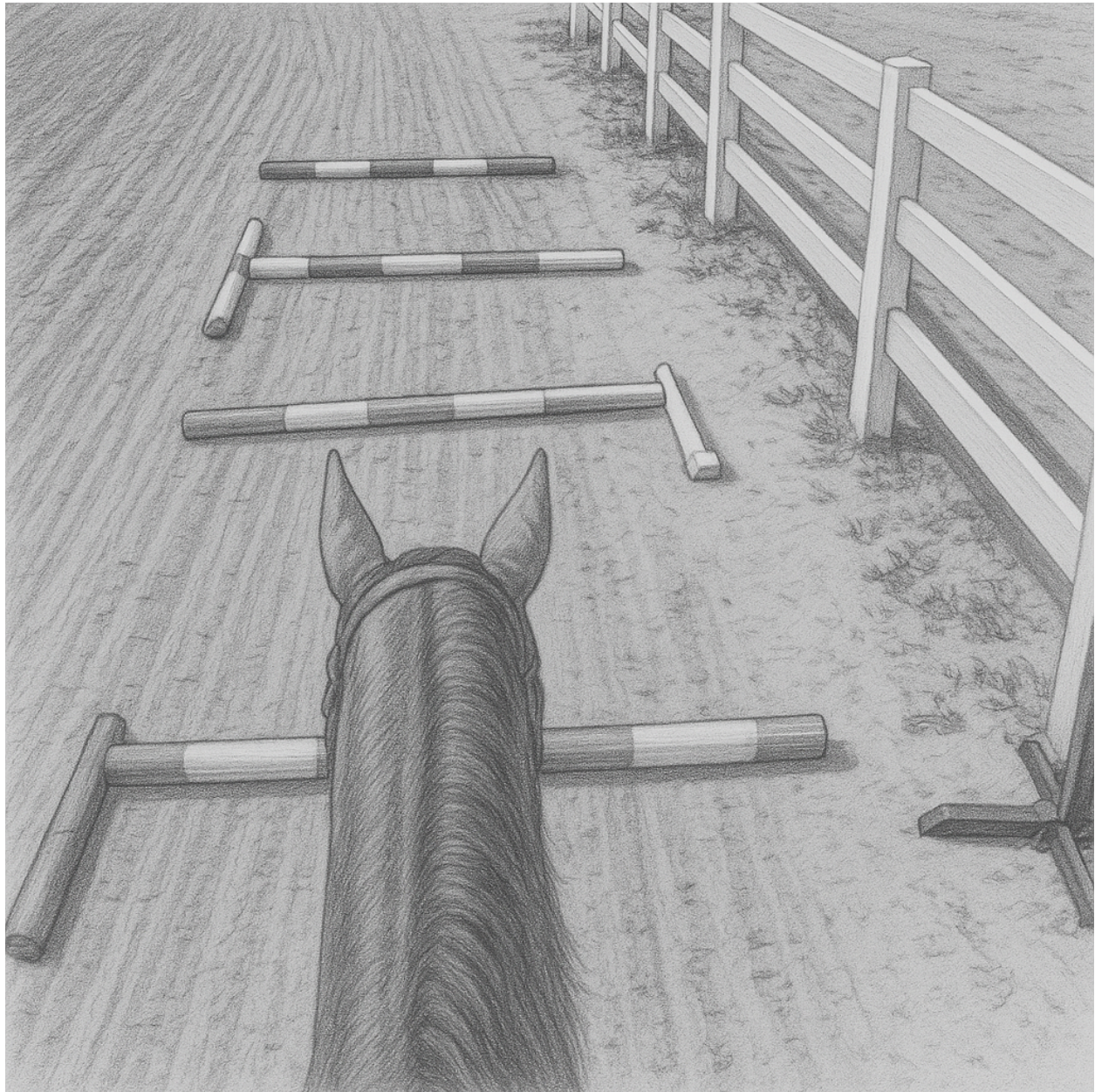
- Sudden forelimb lameness or tripping
- Heat, swelling, or muscle spasms in shoulder or sternum
- Back soreness that worsens with groundwork or saddle
- Behavioral changes during front-end exercises

Making Stretching a Positive Experience

- Work in a quiet space where your horse feels safe
- Use slow, gentle motions - never force a stretch
- Keep sessions short and consistent (1-3x/week)
- Reward often with soft voice or scratches

1. Pole Work (Strengthening)

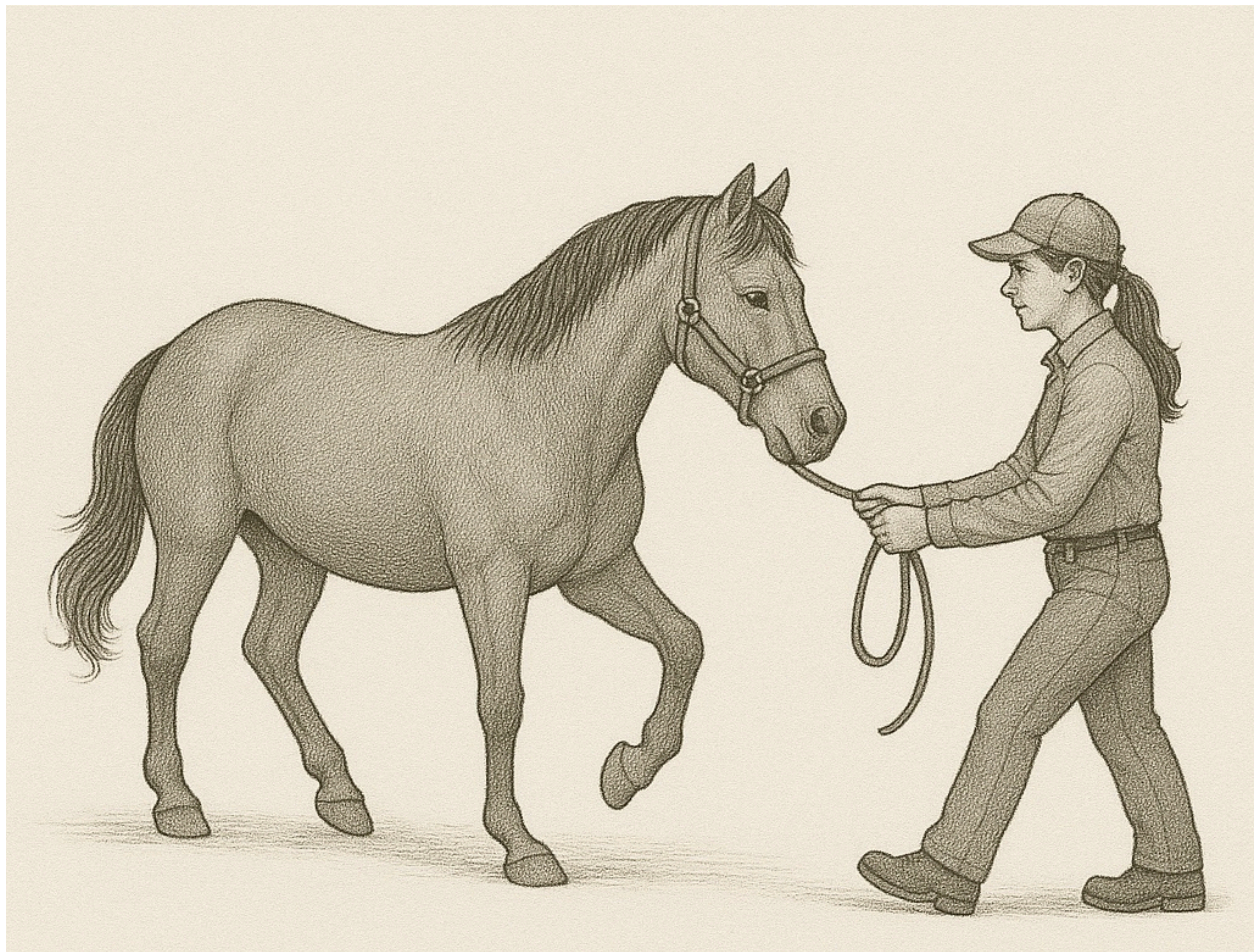
Walk over 3-6 ground poles spaced evenly. Raise the poles slightly to increase lift.
Benefits: Encourages wither lift and shoulder freedom.



2. Backing Up (Strengthening)

Back horse in-hand in a straight line. Focus on slow, even steps (8-10 at a time).

Benefits: Activates core and thoracic sling muscles through posture control.



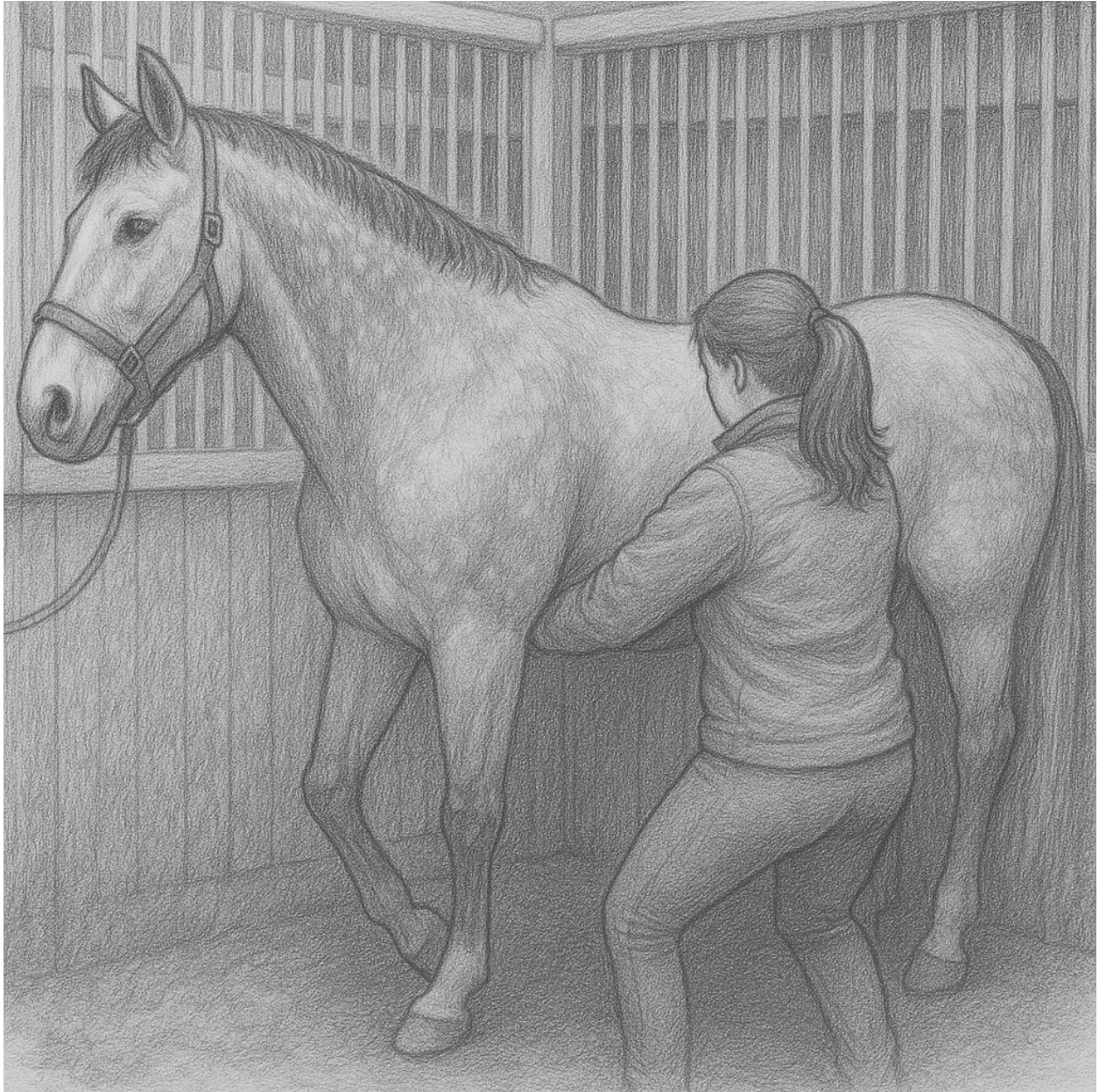
3. Lateral Work at the Walk (Strengthening)

Perform gentle leg yields in-hand or under saddle, encouraging crossover of the front limbs.
Benefits: Builds shoulder coordination and thoracic control.



4. Belly & Sternum Lifts (Stretch + Engage)

Use your fingertips or a blunt edge to apply upward pressure on the belly and sternum midline. Benefits: Encourages lifting of the spine and engagement of deep core and sling muscles.



5. Wither Rocks (Stretching)

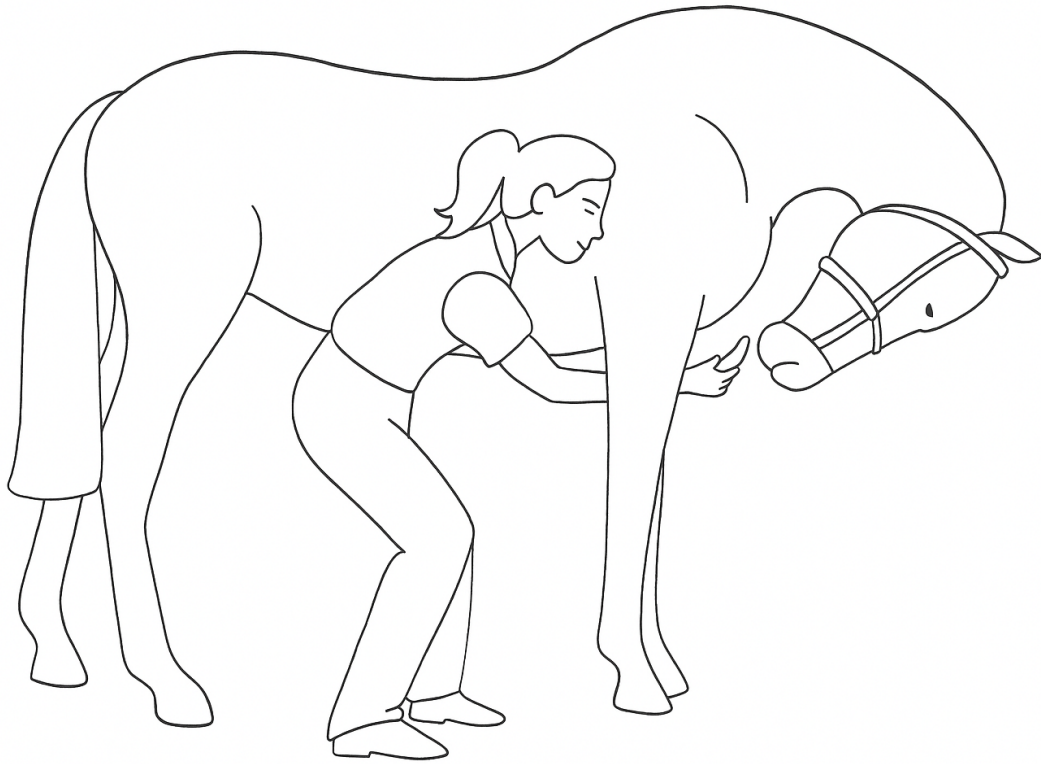
Place your hand near the withers and gently rock the shoulder girdle left to right.
Benefits: Mobilizes the thoracic sling and loosens fascial restriction.



6. Carrot Stretch Chin to Chest (Stretching)

Ask horse to bring chin to chest using a treat or cue. Hold for a few seconds then release.

Benefits: Promotes scapular freedom and softens pectorals.



Tips for Success

- Be consistent: 1-3x per week is more effective than one long session
- Observe posture changes over time
- Alternate strengthening days with rest or stretching
- Consult your vet or bodyworker before starting a new program

Progress & Tracking Notes

Use this section to document how your horse responds to exercises and stretches over time.

Date | Exercise/Stretch | Reaction/Notes
