

12 Top tips

For your horse coming out of winter with a healthy musculoskeletal system
(and strengthening your bond with your horse)

• *In-hand work;*

- Walking activates postural muscles most effectively, and it's important to have no hindrance of a saddle to allow the horse's back to move in a natural way. No bridle or bit (if safe) also reduces potential pressure points, reducing compensations further down the whole body.
- Take your horse for a walk like a dog, including hills.
- The more low-level exercise they do without being put into 'an outline', the more they can find their own balance (and be more relaxed in your company with less expectations).
- Practise circles of various sizes, loops, serpentines with cones, poles, lateral work, backing up, varied textures/surfaces, etc. You could even work on voice cues.

• Discuss with your farrier; good foot balance is vital for your horse's whole body to prevent injury/pathology (including suspensories, SIJ pain & even kissing spine), plus winter muddy conditions can affect the hoof. **Ask** them about your horse's foot balance & if there's anything extra you can do for your horse's foot health. (They're also more likely to do a better job if they know you care)

- **Warm up** before riding; do some squats, lunges, heel raises, ankle circles, shoulder rolls and arm stretches. Your horse will move much more freely if you're not stiff as a board or gripping from cold.
- Don't ignore your own pain, get Physio for yourself as well as your horse! We all know rider asymmetry impacts on the horse.

Get
naked!

Groom

Involve
yourself

Watch



• *The old-fashioned way!*

- A good groom enhances circulation, builds your bond (as long as your horse is happy to be groomed), and can be either muscle stimulating pre-riding, or relaxing post-riding to remove toxins from your horse's body and settle back down to restful grazing.
 - Think of this time as an investment. Use different brushes appropriate to the area; a soft flexible brush for legs with delicate tendons, rubber curry comb over neck, shoulders & back
 - Most importantly, run **your hands** over every part of the horse as you go, ideally daily, to notice any lumps, warmth, dents, trouble picking up a foot, etc.
 - If you have time to do it before & after riding, you can notice any changes e.g. texture of muscles, fur direction, indents, cold patches indicating tack pressure points due to seasonal weight changes, or hot patches potentially signifying a low level injury, before it results in a bigger problem.

- Watch for subtle signs of discomfort with every piece of tack/equipment put on; **change of stance, facial expression, yawning**, etc when put on saddle/girth/bridle, even rugs. These are not 'just the way s/he is', it is ALWAYS communication that we need to listen to, and it's usually the exact piece of equipment that the behaviour is saying there's something causing discomfort..

Thanks for reading, and enjoy your horse

