

Keeping the rider's spine in alignment is just as important as keeping the horse's spine in alignment.

CHIROPRACTIC CARE for the Equestrian

by Michael M. Burak, DC

Fixing vertebral misalignments in horses improves the structure of the vertebral column and therefore improves performance. Misalignments of the horse are very common over the saddle area, the lower back and neck. Chiropractic has been shown to help lameness; it increases range of motion, increases energy and is good for overall wellness.

Vertebral misalignments can also cause problems for the rider. Ironically, riding can contribute to these problems.

How does a rider incur vertebral misalignments from riding a horse? Actually, it is more common than one would think. When riding at a walk, the rider is sitting flat on the saddle. Minimal bouncing and lateral movement take place, but those movements still cause stress upon the spinal vertebral segments. As a rider goes into a trot, canter or especially gallop, stress placed upon the spine increases exponentially. Weight is transferred back and forth from buttocks to legs, causing repetitive stress to the spine. Also, most riders favor one leg to the other, so more weight is put on that particular sacro-iliac (SI) joint.

Various diagnostic tools help determine where misalignments are and how to correct them. The most basic indicator is, obviously, pain. Many riders have lower back pain, most likely SI joint dysfunction. The sacro-iliac joint is the "bump" at the top of the buttocks, either on the right or left. Many times, the shifting of the pelvis causes one of

the legs to be shorter than the other. When that happens, compensations that take place can cause various problems.

To determine if you have SI problems, you can do a few checks yourself:

- ✓ Is that bump tender to touch?
- ✓ Is it hot? (indicates inflammation)
- ✓ Are there muscle spasms around the joint?
- ✓ Is it difficult to lift that particular leg?
- ✓ Is one leg shorter than the other? (Have someone look at your leg length while you're lying on your stomach with your head down and arms at your side)

Check out the VIDEO
"Chiropractic for Your Foal" at
www.HolisticHorse.com
(video links on left)

Leg Length Inequality is a factor in pelvic rotation. If the pelvis moves posterior, the femur moves upward causing a short leg. The body compensates by expanding the muscles on that particular leg. After a while, the SI joint goes into spasm, becomes inflamed and causes pain. That pain can be dull, achy and localized, sharp and localized, sharp and radicular (sciatica) and can also cause numbness and tingling.

People rarely go to the chiropractor unless they are in pain. When they do, the initial chiropractic examination

will include a case history, orthopedic/neurological examination, physical examination and most likely a set of x-rays. The orthopedic examination should be able to re-create pain in the SI joint in question. Static palpation will find tender spots and motion palpation will find lack of motion in the joint. A thorough exam will also check for vertebral misalignment.

A course of treatment may begin on that same visit. The patient may feel immediate pain relief and an increase in range of motion. Sometimes it takes a few hours for relief to occur. Visit frequency is determined by the degree of pain (mild, moderate or severe), duration of pain and quality of the pain (sharp, dull, localized). After the SI joint is in its correct juxtaposition and motion, and the patient is feeling better, I recommend a treatment regimen of 1-2 times per month to keep the vertebrae in motion and keeping the spine in its correct alignment.

In sum, vertebral misalignments are very common in the horse rider. Repetitive trauma to the lower back causes pelvic and vertebral rotation, spasm and inflammation of the muscles and a lack of motion in those joints. Chiropractic care, along with physiotherapy, relaxes the muscles and aligns the spine to restore the structure of the joints so they can perform their normal functions.

Michael Burak is a human and equine chiropractor, practicing in Huntingdon Valley, PA for more than 13 years. He is also an adjunct professor at Delaware Valley College. Contact Dr. Burak at www.drmikeburak.com or 215-938-6040.