

November 17, 2003

Title: Hips and Stirrups - What All Riders Should Know

It's a sunny autumn afternoon and you take your horse for a ride. The wheat grows tall in the fields and you decide to ride the edge of the field to spare damaging the crop. Suddenly a grouse flushes from its hiding place causing your mount to startle. The mare's sudden turn to the left causes you to lose balance throwing you to the ground. Striking your shoulder and side of your head you lay dazed hoping nothing has broken. After the initial pain and nausea fades, you feel your shoulder and neck for breaks or bleeding. Nothing is found so you gingerly stand and remount for the long ride home.

The next morning greets you with neck and low back pain yet your shoulder feels fine. The pain persists for several days and you decide to seek help. A visit to your family physician leads to a prescription for muscle relaxant and anti-inflammatory medication. Life goes on and for a while the pain seems to be reducing, then you wake one morning with excruciating low back pain, your neck is stiff as a board and a blinding headache shuts down your day. Having no choice, you have to avoid caring for your horses and must rest. After a week of continuing pain you return to the doctor who orders tests of the neck and shoulder. The tests don't show anything abnormal and you become frustrated. Each day mirrors the past one; waking with pain, fighting it with pain killers and multiple visits for muscle therapy.

You love horses and refuse to give up riding but it's proving more difficult each week. And you notice a strange thing when you mount your horse. Your sitting position feels off. Your right foot rests loose in the stirrup but the left is firm. So you slide down to check the settings. Each is as it was before your accident months earlier. To balance the riding stance now requires raising the right stirrup two centimeters. The adjustment in the stirrup works but your neck and back let you know that your days of riding may soon be over. The required stirrup adjustment bothers you and you can't get it off your mind. Then one day you hear of a type of Chiropractic care that focuses entirely on posture, balancing of hips and leveling of legs and your quest for health soon ends.

In 15 years of practice I have come to find that many ranchers and farmers who have sought my care have similar stories to tell. Falls from horses, being thrown, having your chin hit by the horse's head, etc. can all injure your spine. The injury is mechanical, mechanically distorts your posture, and is mechanically corrected. Our injured rider needed to readjust the stirrup because their entire back was twisted and bent causing the hips to become unlevel and the legs to become uneven. The key to solving the problem lies in the top bone in your neck. It is called ATLAS after the Greek god Atlas who

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carried the world on his shoulders. We now know that Atlas not only carries the head but also controls posture and the level of the hips. Its injury is clearly seen on special, detailed upper neck x-rays. When injured, as in a fall from a horse, the Atlas can be pushed out of its level and balanced position causing it to jam up the side of the head. Untreated the injured Atlas forces a breakdown in posture leading to pain. Our rider has had to readjust the right stirrup to compensate for the tilted hips and to support the high right leg. Pain in her neck and low back results from unrelenting stress on the joints and muscles. Medications help reduce the symptoms but the mechanical stress continues. To complicate things further, the nerves get involved leading to pain away from the back, such as headaches in the back of her head.

To correct this problem and get lasting relief from pain, detailed posture measurements and x-rays of the Atlas region are required. Then a low depth, controlled and highly specific adjustment to the Atlas is made to coax it back to where it belongs. Improvement in posture with lessening of the pain is expected within one month. Then the stirrups have to be readjusted to where they were before the injury and your riding days return.

Respectfully submitted by:

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