

F.I.T.S. -2

(Fitness In The Saddle)

Proper Pelvis Position

By Jennifer Malott Kotylo

Pelvis' first is my motto. If your pelvis isn't in the correct position, riding is either going to be difficult, uncomfortable or almost impossible, especially if your chosen discipline requires you to keep your bottom in the saddle most of the time.

In addition to being in the correct position, it also has to move correctly. Most of us have the mistaken idea that the pelvis is fairly static, but in reality it should be able to move in three dimensions.

Any hiccup in the pelvis' ability to move or maintain its correct position causes the majority of common riding problems: Are you crooked in the saddle? Does one stirrup always seem longer than the other? Can't follow the canter in one direction? Have trouble picking up one canter lead? Does riding create soreness in the lower part of your back? Do you have trouble with lateral movements or flying changes in one direction but not the other? Does your head tilt off to one side? Is one shoulder higher than the other? More than likely your pelvis is out of whack.

Your pelvis might appear to be one bone, but is actually three bones – the diamond shaped sacrum in the middle and two ear shaped bones - the iliac on either side. These three bones are connected by very tough cartilage that seemingly does not move. However, this cartilage allows the pelvis to flex ever so slightly in three dimensions. If it can't flex properly, the body compensates by becoming crooked.

So before I start fixing someone's head position, or uneven stirrup length, I take a look at what is going on with their pelvis.

If a person has difficulty keeping the proper alignment from head to heel, sitting the trot or canter, or their hands are bouncing, I check to make sure that their pelvis is at the proper angle. In general, motion in a body occurs most efficiently when all of the joints are in a neutral position – basically when they are neither over flexed nor over extended. When your pelvis isn't able to achieve neutral, relative to the correct position of the rest of your body, a rider will either assume a **tucked or chair seat** (*bottom of the pelvis is too far forward relative to the top – over flexed at the hip*) or a **fork or arched seat** (*where the bottom of the pelvis is too far back relative to the top – over flexed where the pelvis meets the spine*). If your pelvis is in **neutral** or basically stacked vertically, then it has a chance to follow correctly.

Yes, I know this sounds rather complicated, but truly it is where the rubber meets the road in riding correctly. Your legs and your torso can only operate properly if they are attached to a properly functioning pelvis. For your pelvis to function correctly, all of the muscles around it need to be balanced in terms of strength and flexibility. Your tummy must be as strong as your back and your hamstrings need to be as strong as your quads. The inside of your thighs need to be as flexible as the outside of your thighs and your right waist must be as long as your left.



TUCKED PELVIS



ARCHED PELVIS



NEUTRAL PELVIS

By balancing your pelvis, you will achieve better communication and harmony with your horse and hopefully save you from a sore lower back. Here are just a couple of super simple movement exercises to help you get started.

1.Knee sways: Lay on your back with your knees bent, legs together and feet flat on the floor. If your neck is straining, place a small pillow under your head. With no muscle, allow your legs to fall to one side (don't force them to the ground, just let them go to where they go naturally.) Then gently bring them back up and let them fall to the other side. Continue "swaying" for a minute or two.

2.Hamstring stretches: Still on your back, keep one leg bent with your foot on the floor. Straighten the other one and lift it up towards the ceiling. Place your hands behind your thigh and place some gentle tension on it, pulling it towards your nose. Don't over strain or pulse AND do not let your back arch. Just breath into the stretch. Hold for 30 seconds to a minute. Release and then repeat. Do the same with the other leg.

3.Pelvic clock: Still on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, lift your tail bone off of the floor just until your lower back flattens. Bring your pelvis back into its starting position and then press your tail bone into the floor letting your lower back arch slightly. Continue to oscillate between these two positions for a minute or two.

I want to hear from you! Your health and fitness is just as important as the health and fitness of your horse so email me with any questions or challenges you are facing!

Jennifer developed a passion for body awareness and biomechanics while pursuing her lifelong quest of international level dressage riding. She is a certified Core Dynamics Pilates Instructor, certified Equilates teacher and certified Balimo practitioner. Jennifer is also the creator of the DVD program "**Improve Your Riding Through Movement.**" No matter what style of riding you are into – no matter what your experience level is and no matter what your age may be, these DVDs will help you create a body that is more flexible, safer in the saddle and one that can enjoy riding for years and years to come. Jennifer is also a national speaker on both health and wellness topics.

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