

Pre-Ride Stretches for Performance Horses

Activate Your Horse's Core

It's best to perform these stretching exercises before the more intense part of each ride but after a walking warm-up period or an [EquiVibe](#) session.

Unless you're an experienced equine bodywork professional, for safety's sake don't attempt back lift stretches with a horse that hasn't been properly desensitized, or that you're unfamiliar with.

Even with your own horses, proceed with caution in case they become startled by the new sensation of lifting and rounding their back.

1. Standing directly behind your horse, use your index and middle fingers on both hands to firmly push into the large, round muscle of your horse's hind quarters, about half way between the tuber coxae (the side of the pelvis above the flank) and the tuber sacrale (highest point of the pelvis).

Pull both fingers down your horse's rear, toward you as you maintain pressure. You'll hit a "sweet spot" that will cause your horse to engage his core muscles, tuck his pelvis under himself and lift his back. Repeat three times, being sure to give your horse a moment to relax in between each stretch.



([Click here](#) for an image showing the skeletal anatomy of a horse's pelvis.)

2. Next, stand off to one side of your horse's hind quarters, still facing your horse. Use your fingers (or a hoof pick) to apply the same kind of moving pressure but start near the opposite tuber coxae (bony point of the pelvis above the flank) of the side you are standing on, and pull diagonally across your horse's hind quarters toward the head of your horse's tail.



This will cause your horse to lift and engage his core, while also bending laterally (bulging his rib cage) away from you. Repeat three times on each side.

3. Combine both of these exercises for an even greater effect by performing exercise #2 while you reach under his abdomen and apply pressure around the area of his belly button with your fingers while you pull back and maintain even pressure.

This will cause the horse to bend laterally and lift his back and engage his core muscles to an even greater degree. Again, make sure your horse is comfortable and confident about being touched all over his body before executing these exercises.



Reach Across and Apply Pressure from Hip to Tail for Core Engagement AND Lateral Bend

Treat Neck Stretches

Two to three stretches for a treat or carrot on each side and down between the front legs.



Leg Stretches for Soundness, Strength & Speed



Front Fetlock Stretches
Forward and back, 3 sets of 5 seconds each. Also perform stretches on the hind fetlocks



Foreleg Stretch
Using your inside (horse side) thigh, bring the bottom of the horse's foot to level, and hold for 20 seconds



Shoulder Lift
(Lift the knee to stretch the shoulder) Support just above the knee, allow the lower leg to hang



Front Leg Extension
Support the foot/fetlock, gently ask to stretch forward and step down (be careful!)



Rearward Hind Extension
Allow the cannon bone to rest on your leg as you squat low and encourage the leg back. Hold up to 20 seconds, and release on relaxation.



Forward Hind Extension
Pick up foot, then back up to straddle your horse's front leg. Hold stretch then gently set foot down gently so the horse will stay there for a moment.

Success & Safety Tips:

- Gently challenge your horse to go just outside his comfortable range of motion, without forcing
- Keep the horse's legs aligned with the body, support the joints and don't pull or hold the soft tissues
- Hold stretches for 20-30 seconds or do 3 sets of 5 – 10 seconds
- Always use caution when under, directly in front of, or behind a horse

To increase speed, we must either increase the rate at which the feet move, or increase the distance covered with each step. When stretches are performed regularly after a brief warm-up before every ride, our horses become more and more supple and flexible, and are better prepared to practice traveling with quality, forward movement, which transfers to more strength, speed and soundness over time.