

HOW CAN PILATES HELP HORSE RIDERS?

By Cathy Baynes



Learning to understand how and why our bodies work as they do will help us as riders to create a better outcome for any particular situation whilst riding. We notice immediately if our horse is lame or “tight” in their movement, a pity they can’t do the same for us!

Hectic lifestyles sitting in front of the computer for hours at a time, stress tension, lifting heavy objects and so on, leads to imbalances in our bodies. Yet, we as riders are 50% of the partnership with our horse and we have a great influence over them.

So let’s stop for a moment and take a look in the mirror:

- Can we even stand up straight?
- Are our shoulders down and level?
- Do we lean to one side?
- Is our breathing effective?
- And as for our balance?

When you next sit on your horse, remember what you have seen in the mirror:

- Not sitting straight – the rider may have weak oblique (side) muscles
- Legs too far forward or upper body tipping forward – the rider may have tight hip flexors
- Head nodding – the rider may have tension in the back and or shoulder girdle
- Lower back pain – check rider posture for starters (there are many other reasons)
- Hands/body “bouncing” – this indicates poor core stability
- Tension/fear – is the rider breathing ineffectively?

The principles of pilates, breath, control, centering /development of core muscles, balance, quality and precision of movement in a flowing way, concentration, awareness, stamina and relaxation, mirror those qualities we simply expect from our horses in a dressage test!

All of these elements can be combined in a series of exercises that are easily adaptable for the less able and readily progressed for those people up for something a little more challenging. There is no “quick fix” however, and a visit to your GP will always be recommended before you take up a new form of exercise. It should also be noted that the process of warming up and cooling down are as important as the main part of the exercise itself.

Pilates, when used as a regular form of exercise, helps to strengthen our core muscles, improves our balance and coordination, and aids control through effective breathing techniques, which also enhances relaxation.

I’m sure our horses would agree!