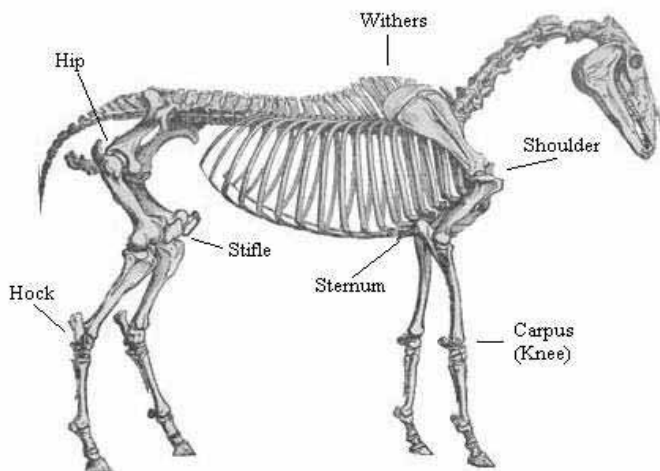


Performance Chiropractic Care for Your Horse

by Christine Woodford, DVM

Performance horses are the athletes of the equine world. Their bodies are extremely vulnerable to injury due to the strain of athletic conditioning, regardless of discipline. The stress of any kind of work can result in a disruption of natural motion of the horse's vertebrae. In recent years, the use of alternative therapies in equine medicine has almost doubled. Therapeutic options such as acupuncture and chiropractic performed by properly trained individuals can complement traditional veterinary medicine. The combined treatment protocol can optimize the horse's health and performance.

As an equine veterinarian certified in animal chiropractic, a common question that I am asked is, "How do horses get out of alignment?" My response is usually, "By being horses...being saddled, asked to carry the weight of a rider, and asked to perform as athletes." One of the most common misalignments that I find in performance horses is withers pulled to the left and the sternum pushed to the right. The reason for this type of misalignment stems from a simple horsemanship lesson we all have been taught from the beginning - mount from the left side. Keep in mind that every time we mount and dismount from the left side, we are pulling on the horse's withers. The withers are connected by the ribs to the horse's sternum. When we pull the withers to the left, it most commonly displaces the horse's sternum to the right. This can cause the horse to resent being saddled and/or the girth being tightened, thus making the horse "cinchy". What can one do when a horse becomes this way? A thorough chiropractic examination and adjustment by a qualified doctor can help.



Last month I treated a quarter horse mare, *Only and Forever*, that was "cinchy." She was very touchy in the ribs and withers and resented the saddle being tightened. When I adjusted her sternum, she actually let out a "squeal," then took a deep breath and started to lick her lips. Throughout the rest of the chiropractic session she became much more relaxed and quiet in the eye. The trainers and owners reported that the horse was riding better after the adjustment. Two weeks later the mare won her western pleasure maturity class at the Tom Powers Futurity in Michigan.

Now, chiropractic will not replace traditional medicine. If a horse needs its hocks injected, it needs its hocks injected. Most traditional programs aim at treating symptoms as they occur. Because after all, that is what veterinarians are called upon to do, to treat horses



Only and Forever, owned by Julia Albaugh, shown by Shannon Vroegh Western Pleasure Maturity Class winners at the 2007 Tom Powers Futurity Photo by M. Chris Leese, PleasureHorse.com

that have problems. If the horse has a lameness issue, it must be addressed first by a veterinarian. Chiropractic care can be used once the primary source of pain has been treated. Routine chiropractic maintenance can aid to keep the body balanced to increase the time intervals between joint injections.

To increase effectiveness of a chiropractic treatment, other alternative therapies can also be used. Acupuncture, therapeutic massage, nutritional and herbal supplements, combined with a traditional medicine and proper conditioning are all powerful components of a comprehensive care and prevention program. Integrating the various forms of therapy can decrease the possibilities of injuries and optimize the health and performance of our equine athletes.



Dr. Woodford graduated Summa Cum Laude from Creighton University in Omaha, NE in 1994 with a Bachelors of Science Degree in Chemistry. She then received a Master of Science in Organic Chemistry from

the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1996. In 2002, Dr. Woodford graduated with honors from Iowa State University and received her Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine.

With an interest in lameness and performance horses, Dr. Woodford pursued academic studies in alternative therapies. In 2006, Dr. Woodford became certified in Animal Chiropractic by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association. She just completed the Equine Veterinary Acupuncture course at the Chi Institute in Florida.