

GUIDELINES FOR STRETCHING THE LIMBS

There are several types of stretching approaches and for our purposes we are going to apply a type of stretch with the limb as relaxed as possible. This is called *static passive stretching*, which means the horse is standing still, he is supported by the handler to resist gravity and the muscle itself is not contracting. However, it has to be understood that no muscle can truly be passive; some kind of contraction is always taking place. We want to avoid any type of extreme stretching so these techniques can be applied safely to the warmed up sound horse.

Let's go over a few guideline for stretching:

- Choose a quiet area to work.
- You should think about the surface that you are working on too. Uneven surfaces are hard on both you and the horse and slippery surfaces are just not safe.
- Don't "hard tie". If your horse should pull back or panic, you want your tie to release slowly.
- Warm up the horse first by walking and trotting either in hand or under saddle for 10-15 minutes or during your bodywork session.
- Repeat each stretch at least twice.
- Apply the stretch slowly to avoid stimulating the myotonic stretch reflex. Stretching rapidly will cause muscle tension, and actually tighten the muscle you are trying to stretch.
- Keep the stretches short and small in the beginning; you are training the horse to accept this work, not fight it.
- Resume relaxation techniques if the horse tightens or resists
- Always use a support stance to protect your back. Have your arm resting where it is comfortable on your thigh or knee.



Crosstie with "mock ties". Note the free end of the rope wrap around the portion going to the halter.

When stretching the forelimb:

- Always have the limb in a slightly flexed position to avoid hyperextension. If the horse locks out his joints, he will shift his weight on you. It is also difficult to apply any other front end stretches once he learns this.
- The positioning is always above the knee (carpus) to avoid torquing of the joint*
- Stretch with two hands
- Try not to place your hands on the tendons
- Stretch in the natural line of movement
- Allow the horse to square up behind
- Keep the carpal joint (knee) open. Over flexing will aggravate an existing condition

** Often you are going to see examples of experts with hands positioning at the distal end of the limb. These true experts have the natural instinct and appreciation of the horse's comfort level. When performed correctly you'll notice that there is still a slight bend in the carpal joint thus avoiding hyperextension and tightening (static active stretch). However, they should still be using proper body mechanic for their own safety and for the horse.*

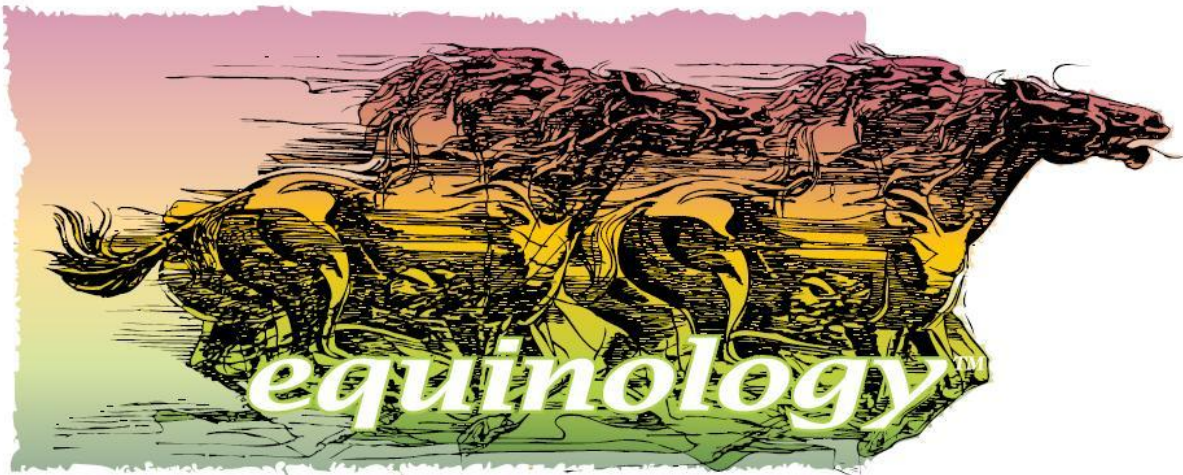
When stretching the hindlimb:

- Stretch with two hands
- Try not to place your hands on the tendons
- Stretch in the natural line of movement
- Allow him to square up in front. If the horse cannot do this, just allow him to be comfortable and stable
- If you use a toehold, remember to release it for the stretch.

If you have any concerns about a particular stretch for a certain horse, please seek your veterinarian's advice.

STRETCH TIMES:

Beginning: No more than 10 seconds hold time
Intermediate: No more than 15 seconds hold time
Advanced: About 30 seconds hold time



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