

# Pain-free hips

## Mobility and strength training create less stress in the saddle

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**M**any riders know first-hand the wear and tear horses can exert on your body. For many, the constant motion of time in the saddle causes sore hips and lower back. For others, a past injury may come into play.

Even something as common as an imbalance between tight and weak muscles can leave joints aching after a ride.

### Strength and Mobility

While you may opt to tolerate discomfort in exchange for precious time in the saddle, it may actually be a trade off you are not forced to make.

With exercises designed to increase flexibility and strength through the hips, hip flexors, quads, and hamstrings, you should quickly feel more comfortable both in and out of the saddle. A nice bonus is the added ability to better control your seat.

Mobility and strength work together to reduce the wear and tear riding places on your hips. The quadriceps and hamstrings work as an equal team.

Stretching the hip flexors keeps the knee down and weight in the stirrups. Engaging the glutes stabilizes the hips and allows you to follow the motion.

Flexibility in the hips controls the rotation of the hips in the saddle. When the muscles that surround the hips are strong and actively engaged, less stress is placed on the actual joints. That translates into less pain in the hips.

### The Exercises

Hip exercises that work each side in isolation will give you the best results for balanced strength and flexibility.

If you always work both hips together, like you would in a standard squat, the stronger hip will naturally do most of the work. While your hips will get stronger, there will continue to be an imbalance.

Exercises such as one-legged squats and single leg hip lifts work one hip at a time; this forces the weaker hip to work equally and come into balance.

A few simple exercises done regularly will increase your comfort as the muscles develop to support the hips.

While you're walking your horse in your warm-up, try marching and two point. Marching activates your glutes and quads while improving your range of motion. It also encourages correct balance and centering your seat.

The two point position allows riders of all disciplines to stretch the leg through the hip flexors and hamstrings.

On the ground, practice simple exercises to add strength. These can easily be done in workout wear or riding clothes.

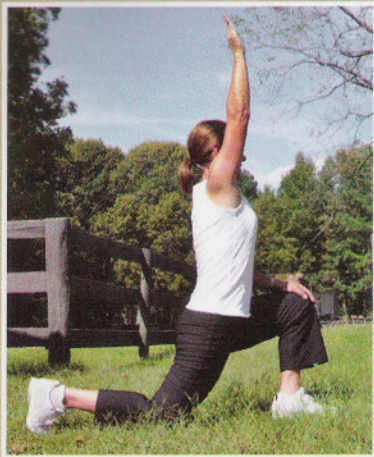


**Exercise 1: Marching On:** On a reliable horse, bring one knee up and away from the saddle; then carefully place back down. Repeat on the opposite side. If you are unsure of your balance, put one hand on the pommel.



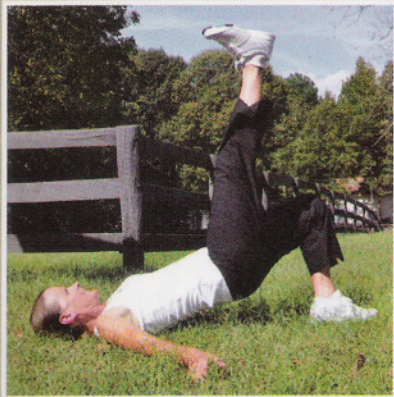
**Exercise 2: Two Point** No matter what discipline you ride, two point is a great warm-up exercise for stretching the legs and finding balance

Off the horse there are many exercises that strengthen the muscles that support the hips. Often exercises can work double duty by increasing the range of motion as well as strength. You may recognize some of the exercises as prescriptions for reducing lower back pain. The comfort of the lower back and the health of the hips are closely related.



**Exercise 3: Psoas Stretch**  
This rider-friendly stretch starts in a forward lunge position, lower the back knee to the ground. Raise the arm on the same side as the lowered knee. Push your hips squarely forward until you feel the stretch. Repeat on opposite side.

**Exercise 4: Single Hip Raise**  
This is a great exercise for core stability and glute activation. On your back with your knees bent and hips raised, lift one leg straight in the air. Drop the hip to the ground and raise the hip. Repeat with opposite leg raised.



**Exercise 5: Leg Swings**  
Place your hands against a wall or fence and gently swing one leg across the front of your body and back again. Repeat with opposite leg.



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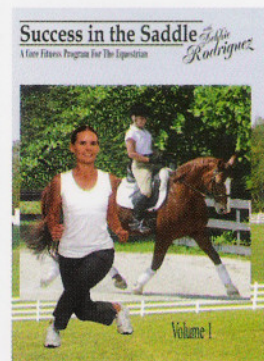
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