

# ENM — Balance your horse's tissue for soundness 29

By Bobbi Jackson

You keep to a well planned training schedule and lesson at least once a week with a top coach. You've had your horse's teeth done, the saddle fitter checks your saddle regularly and the blacksmith does a great job shoeing. Your horse is in excellent health, on a healthy diet and at a good weight. Your horse sees the chiropractor and an acupuncturist and always has a massage after a show. Yet you feel as if you and your horse ought to be doing better.

## Carry me over the moon

When you first saw your horse, remember thinking he could carry you over the moon? Remember how he took your breath away when you first watched his videos? But these days your horse seems something less than what you imagined. Your horse is honest and has a great work ethic but ordinary is how you feel on a ride. Where did that "take-your-breath-away" feeling go?

Sometimes it's not the obvious obstacles that stand between where we are and our dreams. The accomplishments we seek may be within our reach if we ask the right questions. Maybe it's not the training, your riding abilities, the shoeing, saddle, or massages. Maybe what's holding you back is coming from deep inside the core of your beloved mount's body and it's possible your horse is as frustrated as you. We owe it to our horses to let them be the spectacular creatures we know they can be. Structural Integration may be the answer and connective tissue is the medium.

## Connective tissue, the body's richest sensory organ

Connective tissue (or fascia) is your richest sensory organ with nerve endings throughout. Connective tissue is an internal web that permeates and surrounds our entire body. It is found under the skin, it encases all of our organs, bones, it surrounds each muscle as well as each muscle fiber itself, and the tendons and ligaments are made of it. Due to its web-like structure, when one area of connective tissue is affected, it affects other areas as well.

## Water

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van for a cool drink, it's highly likely that your horse would benefit from a long drink too. You need to be proactive to keep your horse healthy and hydrated. Do this and you'll avoid the potentially deadly effects of dehydration.

For more information see horse-quercher.com .

So how does this translate into problems your horse may have? Here is an example. If your horse got kicked, stumbled and fell, or had a tear to a tendon or ligament, even if this happened many years ago, that incident most likely had a negative effect on the elasticity of the connective tissue. When fascia is traumatized an entire series of events takes place to protect the body. The body seeks to repair itself by gluing injured areas. After awhile, the connective tissue can lose its elastic and gel-like qualities, becoming fibrous and glue-like instead. This happens because when the normal arrangement of fibers becomes disturbed. The area, due to the compression of the injured tissue actually contains less water, hence this glue-like state occurs.

How would this show up in your horse? The body's web of connective tissue is interconnected, so an injury in one area affects other areas as well. When one area becomes rigid, the body creates compensation patterns in its attempt to protect itself and stay fluid. But this only ends up compromising other areas in our bodies, which due to excessive strain, may begin to set up their own areas of resistance. And so it

goes, now the horse has compensation patterns zigzagging across its body.

The problem in all of this is that connective tissue will not loosen up on its own. It may actually become stuck to itself or other tissues in what we call an "adhesion" that prevents proper movement in that part of the body, something that's fairly common even in the best of horses.

## Ida Rolf develops Structural Integration

A very productive way to bring about permanent changes in equine connective tissues is a premier model of Structural Integration called Equine Natural Movement (ENM). Its roots are based in the school of human Roling, a method developed in the 1920s by Dr. Ida Rolf, a woman with a PhD in biochemistry and physiology. Dr. Rolf had been kicked in the chest by a horse, developed severe problems from it and couldn't find anyone to help her.

Dr. Rolf was very resilient and she wouldn't allow her injuries to bring her life to a standstill. Using her sound scientific knowledge, she developed a method to help herself heal. Today this



Bobbi Jackson, Equine Natural Movement Practitioner does hands-on body work on Coco.

method is known as Structural Integration (SI), a hands-on manipulation of the body's connective tissue. SI releases, realigns and balances the whole body with the goal of optimizing both the structure (shape) and function (movement) of the entire body. SI frees up restrictive holding patterns that inhibit movement. SI improves body awareness, movement patterns, postural alignment and overall athletic performance so it's eminently useful for horses.

es. It can resolve pain and discomfort from many different causes, including back pain, repetitive motion injury, trauma, surgery and aging. In humans it can be an excellent foundation for and compliment to Yoga, Pilates, and even help one become a more balanced rider.

## SI: Helping other therapies be more effective

Structural Integration can also help other therapies be more effective. Chiropractors align bones to keep the nervous system functioning. Massage therapy can relax muscles, increase circulation and remove toxins in the blood. Acupuncture uses the body's nerve pathways to relieve pain and improve organ function.

Here's an example of how SI can assist chiropractic. If tissue is restricted but you demand movement, especially the balanced movement we use in riding, a joint may reposition itself to accommodate that motion. When bones are misaligned, a chiropractor can adjust those skeletal structure so the joint goes where it ought to be. Structural Integration works with the connective tissue by releasing the chronic

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# 30 AquaPacer still making a big splash

PITTSVILLE, N.J. — The underwater treadmill at High Brass Farm has been busy in the six years since it was installed. The farm recently conducted their 10,000th session on the machine.

The 10-stall, vet-assisted Rehab Barn has been busy helping performance horses with injuries or fitness issues with an effective therapy program featuring the AquaPacer, made by Ferno.

Owned by hunter/jumper trainer Liz Perry-Merbler and her husband, Mike Merbler, High Brass also comprises a top show train-

ing and boarding facility, and most of the show horses there use the AquaPacer on a regular basis as a conditioning and maintenance tool.

The rehab facility welcomes horses from all disciplines.

Although the treadmill is the centerpiece of its rehabilitation facility, the farm can do more than just treat injuries.

Once the horses are healed, the farm can also get them back in shape and back to business whatever their career.

In addition to in-house patients

and horses in training at High Brass, the AquaPacer is available, at a very affordable rate, to those wanting to ship horses in on a per-use basis.

High Brass Farm has also welcomed local Centenary College students, 4-H and Pony Club youth to the farm to tour the facility and see the treadmill in action.

To find out more about the AquaPacer, or to schedule a visit to the High Brass Farm Rehab Barn or training facility, contact Liz Perry-Merbler or Mike Merbler at 908-996-1002.



Warren County (N.J.) 4-H horse club members visit High Brass Farm to see the AquaPacer underwater treadmill in action this summer.

## Movement—

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holding in the tissue, stopping it from pulling on the bones. This makes a chiropractor's work easier because the tissues don't tag along in the adjustment and tug the bones the wrong way again. Adjustments in this situation can be more profound and longer lasting.

## Equine Natural Movement

Equine Natural Movement is Structural Integration for horses.

It was developed by Joseph Free-

man who was a human Structural Integrationist. Joseph didn't have a horse background when a client asked him if he could look at a chronically injured horse for her. Joseph always says, "I didn't know anything about horses, didn't even know I might get hurt. I was too stupid to say no." Using his human SI skills, Joseph not only helped the horse but he found he loved working with horses and continued his work with them for the last 16 years. He developed the Equine Natural Movement Series in 1999 and has been training practitioners at his school since 2001.

Equine Natural Movement is a

series of five sessions done over a few months which allows the horse to integrate the changes in their bodies. Most horses fit into the category of performance enhancement, though some chronically impaired horses are better called "project cases" who need more long term work. The difference between the two is that with performance enhancement, you get to see what the horse can truly be. In rehab situations, the goal is to bring the animal to a stable, balanced place and keep them there.

The work always progresses at a rate each horse can absorb and is carried out in a very gentle, re-

spectful manner. As the horse absorbs and incorporates the changes, the work proceeds deeper. Structural Integrationists often liken the process of this work to "peeling away the layers of an onion." Sessions generally take between 90 minutes and two hours and take place in the stall. Owners are encouraged to continue training throughout the series, working half as much the following day so the horse has time to integrate the movement changes and fully absorb the improvements in flexibility and balance. Horses are smart; they pick up the shifts pretty readily.

Bobbi Jackson has a degree in animal science from Pennsylvania State University (PSU) and worked as a research assistant in the animal science departments of PSU and at McGill University in Canada. Ms. Jackson is Certified as an Equine Natural Movement Practitioner practicing in PA, NJ, Montreal and available for travel. She offers complimentary evaluations and group seminars. She can be reached at 908-230-0716 or EquineEnhancedMovement@gmail.com or see www.equineenhancedmovement.com.

## Research student needs help with navicular study

Kelsie Mullikin, a student at Mountain Vista Governor's School in Warrenton, Va. is doing a project as part of a two-year research class.

Her project is the relationship between conformation and navicular syndrome. She will be evaluating the conformation of horses that have been diagnosed with this disease.

She is seeking submission of photos of afflicted horses from the side, back and front. She also needs to know the horses's age, breed, height, when they were diagnosed, and whatever else the owner feels is important.

Contact her at kmullikin@mygshome.org for more information or to submit photos or mail them to her at 4543 Canter Lane, Warrenton Va., 20187.

## West Nile is present

West Nile virus has been found in mosquitoes in 15 counties in Pennsylvania but no equine cases had been reported as of mid-July.

Warren County, N.J. also reported its earliest mosquito positive. No other mid-Atlantic states had reported positive mosquito pools.

Pennsylvania DEP and County Staff are responding by increasing surveillance and control activities as needed. In 2010, 5 counties had found evidence of the virus by the same date.

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