

# F.I.T.S. -1

## (Fitness In The Saddle)

## Release Your Hamstrings

By Jennifer Malott Kotylo

I am a stickler about proper pelvic position. Without your pelvis in the proper position (both top to bottom and side to side) you lose your ability to balance around your horse and to follow his motion.

Most of us (riders and non-riders alike) walk around with misaligned pelvises and do not realize it. But when you look in the mirror, are your shoulders uneven? Have you been told that you have one leg longer than the other? Do you have back and/or neck stiffness? Can you turn your head more easily in one direction than the other? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, the culprit may be your pelvis.

So, how do you know if your pelvis may not be in the best alignment? I am going to give you a simple test that only takes you and a full-length mirror. Stand facing away from the mirror approximately five to six feet with your feet hip distance apart (please make sure that your feet are facing straight forward, which means that your first toe - not your big toe - is pointing towards the wall in front of you and that you are balanced equally between the ball of your foot and your heel). Slowly bend forward from your waist and look between your legs. You should now be looking at your backside in the mirror. Look at the top of your hips. They should be parallel to the floor, not sloping to

one side or the other. Congratulations if they are parallel. If they are sloping, slowly shift your weight from one foot to the other until your hips are even. Do you feel a pull or a cramp? This is just your body telling you that it is out of balance muscularly. Slowly stand up.

Many different muscle groups can impact your pelvis' alignment. Here we are going to focus on just one - the dreaded hamstrings. One of the most effective ways I have found to get my hamstrings to let go is by working with a Yamana Body Rolling Ball or Franklin Ball (you do not have to have an authentic Yamana or Franklin ball. Any ball approximately 10 inches in diameter, which is strong enough to sit on and hard enough to exert some pressure on your muscles, will work).

Before you begin working your hamstrings, sit or lay on the floor with your legs stretched out in front of you. Take a moment to feel the sensation of your legs on the floor and to see if one leg appears longer than the other.

Start by placing one seat bone or the other on the ball. (Fig. 1) Use your feet and hands to stabilize yourself (you will feel a bit like a crab). Begin to “massage” your seat bone with the ball by gently rolling back and forth in both linear and circular patterns for two to three minutes (depending on how tight you are; this may be a bit uncomfortable).



Figure 1

If it is too uncomfortable, try taking some of your weight off of the ball by supporting yourself more with your hands and feet). Once you have worked the muscular connections around your seat bone, slowly begin to work the ball down the back of your leg using circular and linear patterns. (Fig. 2) Work the ball down to just above your knee and then back up to your seat bone.

Slowly slide off the ball and test your leg length and the feel in your leg again. If you are like most people, your “worked” leg will seem longer and more in touch with the ground. Your hamstrings and their connections to your seat bone and knee have been released. Proceed with your other leg, starting at your seat bone and working your way down to your knee to even yourself out. Check out your leg length and how they feel on the floor.

Next, take the mirror test again. Hopefully your hips will be much more in alignment (please note that if your hips were very unlevelled and/or your “leg length” was significantly different, do three sets of rolling - first with the “shorter” leg, then the longer and then the shorter again. Know that it is extremely rare that legs are actually of different length. What appear as differing lengths is usually a pelvis torque).

This simple release will help you sit more evenly on your seat bones and allow your legs to hang in a



Figure 2

more natural way around your horse helping you to attain better balance and communication with your equine partner.

I want to hear from you! Your health and fitness is just as important as the health and fitness of your horse so email me with any questions or challenges you are facing!

Jennifer developed a passion for body awareness and biomechanics while pursuing her lifelong quest of international level dressage riding. She is a certified Core Dynamics Pilates Instructor, certified Equilates teacher and certified Balimo practitioner. Jennifer is also the creator of the DVD program “Improve Your Riding Through Movement.”

No matter what style of riding you are into – no matter what your experience level is and no matter what your age may be, these DVDs will help you create a body that is more flexible, safer in the saddle and one that can enjoy riding for years and years to come. Jennifer is also a national speaker on both health and wellness topics.

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