

# Equine Hanna Somatics® Overview

By Patricia Hechter

*Equine Hanna Somatics®, EHS, is a technique used to re-educate the horse's nervous system to release chronic contracted muscles that cause discomfort and limit natural movement. To change this condition EHS is used to trigger a natural reflex that prepares the body for optimal performance.*

The majority of movements performed with a horse during an EHS session are Voluntary Pandiculations. (Pandiculation is the natural reflex that all animals, including humans, are programmed to do to restore the original length and flexibility of the muscles). We achieve this relaxation and restoration with EHS, by emphasizing movements that activate the ability of the motor-cortex in the horse's brain to reduce muscular tension. The technique is simple, slow, and the results are profound.

There is a huge difference between stretching and pandiculation. When using pandiculation to cause a lengthening of a muscle (or a group of muscles) we use a very slow movements. First, we invite the horse to create a contraction, remaining within the comfort level and current range of motion of the horse. Then we guide the horse through a very slow lengthening contraction, often thought of as the "release". With the slow and luxurious "release" of the contraction, you encourage the horse to change the tension levels in their own muscles to be more supple and ready for action.

In contrast, when a muscle is stretched, another natural reflex is triggered, the 'stretch reflex'. When triggered, the stretch reflex causes the muscle to return to its original length, AND it can re-contract the muscle making it shorter.

The stretch is involuntary, occurring at the spinal cord level (not in the brain), and it is completely out of the horse's awareness. There are times stretching may be very beneficial, however stretching is not part of the EHS protocols to achieve naturally supple and lengthened muscles.

Another technique used in Equine Hanna Somatics to assist in the process of restoring relaxation is called Kinetic Mirroring

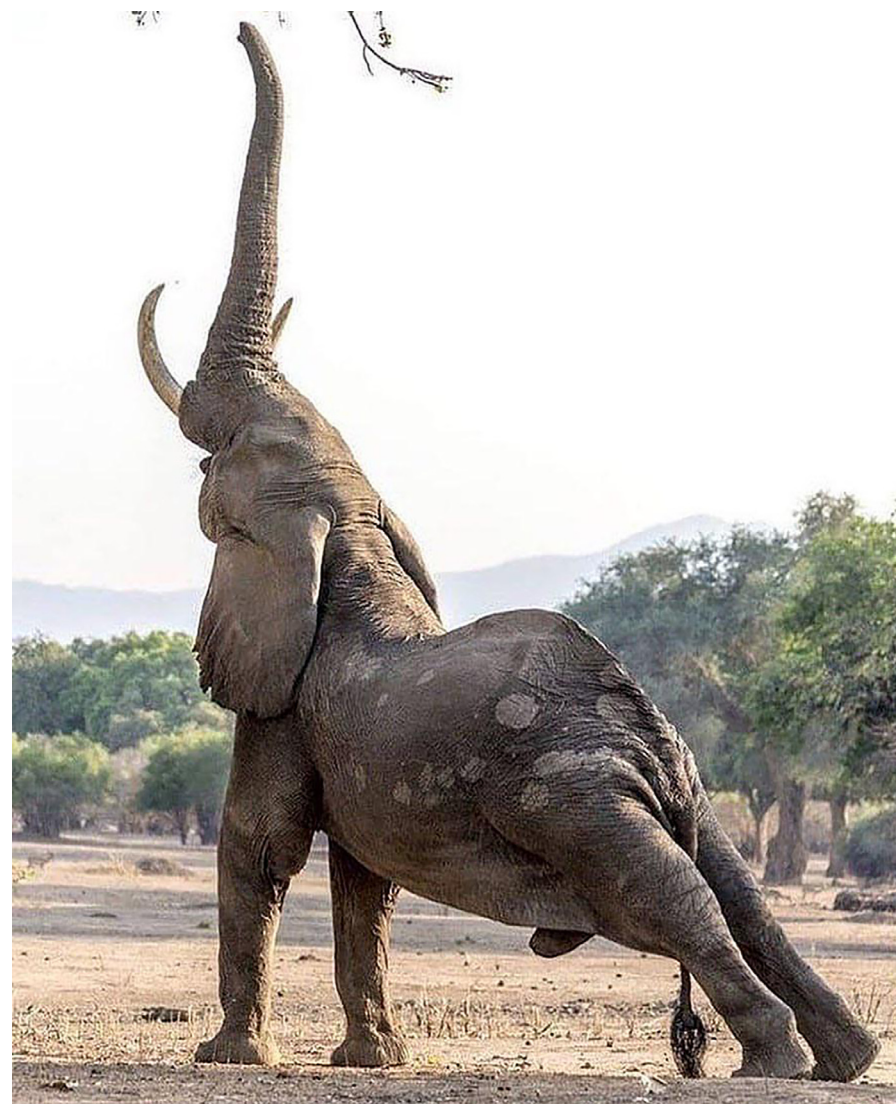
In the September/October 2022 issue I authored an article about Kinetic Mirroring of the Ribcage. In that article, I describe how to use kinetic mirroring to relax the intercostal muscles between the ribs to assist in:

- Maintaining a centered saddle,
- Lateral flexion of both sides,
- Clean canter departs,
- Deep full breaths.

This is a great technique to use both before and after a ride. Below I'll describe a modified way to position your hands while offering your horse the same benefits. Both versions are very effective.

Begin by standing on the left side, facing your horse's ribcage. Place your flat right hand, behind and slightly below where the saddle pad ends. Place your left hand behind and slightly above the horse's armpit.

Using little to no pressure, very gently guide your hands slightly together, on the diagonal (usually only a few millimeters); think about moving an egg yolk. Your horse will feel the energy and tiny movement, and may even participate by bending toward you a bit!



Just as slowly and gently return your hands to neutral. Your horse will feel the invitation to return to a neutral resting posture, and the muscles will be triggered to lengthen a little bit. Do not widen your hands more than your starting position - this is a shortening, and an 'un-shortening' not a stretch.

Repeat this gentle process 3 -5 times before repeating on the right side, see the photo to the right.

In the four 2022 Elite Equestrian articles about Equine Hanna Somatics movements, (Initial Pick-Ups, Lateral Neck Flexion, Kinetic Mirroring of the Ribcage, and Tail Flexion) the reader is advised to gently guide the legs, neck and tail without using any pulling or stretching of the horse's body parts while performing the EHS movements.

When we invite our horses to participate in the EHS voluntary pandiculations and do kinetic mirroring, we are able to access many muscles and groups of muscles with each movement, even the deep muscles that are nearly impossible to influence from the outside.

The tail flexions directly include 6 muscles.  
The hind limb initial pick-ups directly engage 18 muscles.  
The forelimb initial pickups directly affect 15 muscles.  
The lateral neck flexions directly involve 7 muscles.

There are many more muscles and muscle groups that are indirectly altered. When learning and performing EHS sessions we learn everything is truly connected to everything else.

*"...Well, your toe bone connected to your foot bone...  
Your ankle bone connected to your leg bone  
Your leg bone connected to your knee bone  
Your knee bone connected to your thigh bone  
Your thigh bone connected to your hip bone  
Your hip bone connected to your back bone...  
Your neck bone connected to your head bone..."*

*-Lyrics to Dry Bones sung by Delta Rhythm Boys*



Some important concepts to remember when speaking, thinking and performing Equine (or Canine and Human) Hanna Somatics are that we are re-educating the body and mind at the same time, to remind each individual how to move with relaxed and supple muscles.

While we are educating, we are working WITH the horse not "working on" or "doing to".

The horse has a say in how he participates. The human invites and listens. The work is about the horse, on his schedule; it is not about our schedule or, what we want to accomplish.

EHS works with both the deep and superficial muscles of the body, and because we are using the horse's own central nervous system to access them, we can potentially restore relaxation to every single skeletal muscle in the horse!

In upcoming issues I will have articles with an equine dentist and a farrier discussing how EHS supports healthy feet and mouths. I will introduce you to Eleanor Criswell Hanna, the creator of EHS and more Voluntary Pandiculations to perform with your horse. Additionally, I will introduce a 20+ year old Hanoverian who has been in my daily care for almost a year. They will qualify for the Dressage Century Club in 4 years! We will be following his amazing transformation thanks in large part to EHS.

*Trish Hechter grew up riding and working with her mother in Maryland who was renowned for working with "problem" horses. In the mid 90's Trish earned her Reiki 1 and 2 certificates becoming a Reiki Master in 2020. After meeting Ryan Moschell, a Certified Hanna Somatics Educator® (for humans), in 2015, Trish turned her focus to Equine Hanna Somatics® and will be a Certified Equine Hanna Somatics Educator in 2023. For more information about Trish's work and clinics educating people how to improve their horse's postures, please visit [www.HechterEquineMobility.com](http://www.HechterEquineMobility.com).*

*Trish Hechter and Ryan Moschell, CHSE have created a partnership working with equestrians and their horses. Dates are available for their workshops and clinics in 2023.*

*To contact Ryan Moschell and learn more about his work, please visit, [www.GetOutOfShape.com](http://www.GetOutOfShape.com).*

*To purchase a video introduction of EHS please visit, [www.HechterEquineMobility.com/video](http://www.HechterEquineMobility.com/video).*

**To learn more about Equine Hanna Somatics, and to find an equine educator near you, please visit [www.EquineHannaSomatics.org](http://www.EquineHannaSomatics.org).**

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