

Equine Hanna Somatics® Part 2

Lateral Flexion of The Neck

As a follow up to the May/June issue introducing Equine Hanna Somatics® (EHS), this article offers a second movement you can do with your horse. There are four foundational exercises I find beneficial to do while preparing the horse to go to work. These can be accomplished successfully within a short amount of time and the benefits are far reaching! The second movement is Lateral Flexion of the Neck.

By Patricia Hechter

Photos By Stephen Gorospe

Gently place the palms of your hands flat on the cheeks of the horse, as you stand to his left side in front of the shoulder. Invite your horse to bend his neck around your body. Step slightly back towards his shoulder. As the horse's head and neck return to neutral, follow along with the horse by moving your feet and opening your elbows as needed. Maintain a deep and slow breathing as you assist your horse. Move with your horse as slowly as possible; *it is within this slow facilitated pace that healing has the potential to happen.*

It is important to guide the horse's head gently around toward his side; there is no pushing, pulling or stretching involved. In EHS® we invite the horse to participate in the work we do with him to learn about his abilities and locations of potential issues.

Allow the horse to move only as far as he is comfortable by reading and honoring his cues. Resist the urge to ask for more. Be sure his head is as vertical as possible. The horse's ears ought to be pointing to the sky equally on both sides.

If there is a tilt, gently encourage the head back to the last position where his ears are upright. Do not ask the horse to bend his neck beyond this point, as it is counter-productive.

You will repeat the movement *three times* in each direction. Each movement may look and feel different from the previous or the following. The horse may make a large free motion one time, then hardly move his neck or head the remaining times when asked to participate. This is an important part of the process for success.

EHS takes the actual movement from the limbic system, where volunteering and habit live, to the motor cortex of the brain, where choice of movement lives. (This is simplified for the purpose of this article.) This is one of the reasons EHS educators do not use treats, clickers or key words to accomplish their work.

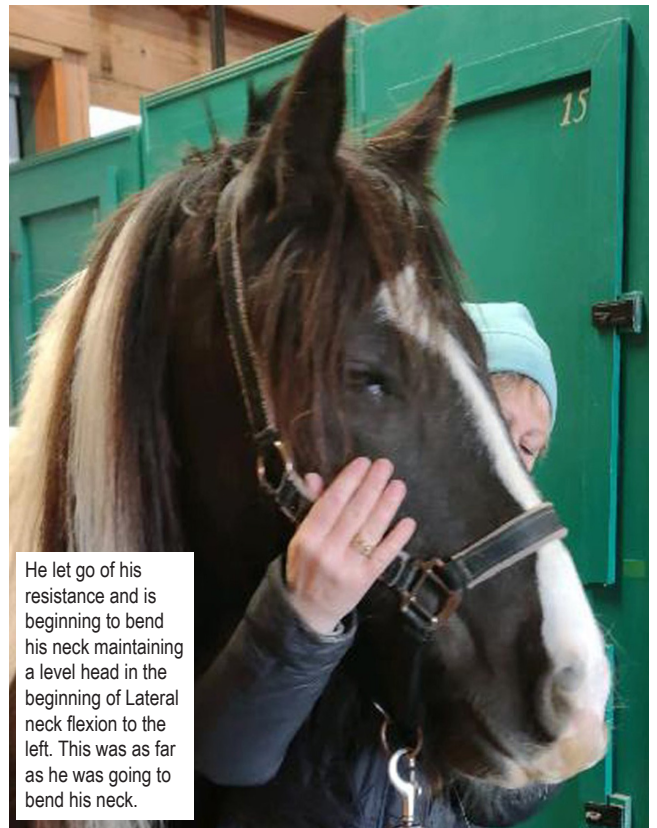
The horse may experience difficulty in bending or returning to neutral in his neck, he may quiver, shake or make larger moves such as pulling his head out of your hands. Much of this is known as "Motor Sensory Amnesia". MSA can happen when there are chronically contracted muscles.

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This Gypsy Vanner demonstrates a bit of resistance when asked for a Lateral Neck Flexion to the left. I remain connected to him, waiting for him to relax. I am not pushing, pulling or stretching his neck.



He let go of his resistance and is beginning to bend his neck maintaining a level head in the beginning of Lateral neck flexion to the left. This was as far as he was going to bend his neck.

