

Equine Hanna Somatics®

Abduction and Adduction of the Limbs

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Every lateral movement a horse makes involves abduction - the moving away from the midline of the body - and adduction - the moving toward the midline of the body - with his limbs. These movements directly involve more than 25 muscles in the neck, chest, shoulder, pelvis, hip, stifle, loin, hock and more.

An Equine Hanna Somatics® session with your horse begins with observing how your horse is standing without being posed. Where are his muscles and tendons directing his posture? Taking photos is a great way of having a reminder of how he is standing before you begin and to check with as you proceed.

How is your horse standing? What is his posture? Are his legs wider or narrower than his shoulders/hips? Does he toe in or out? Is he knock kneed, cow hocked or bowlegged? You will learn that what may have been previously thought to be part of your horse's confirmation is actually his posture. Posture can be adjusted.

Use Initial Pick-ups to gently waken the body's muscles and to prepare the mind/body neuropathways for change by performing Initial Pick-ups of all four limbs. Gently invite your horse to lift his leg as far as his comfort level allows. Pause. Slowly return the foot to a fully weighted neutral location on the ground. The foot does not have to be directly under him, it can be to one side or in front or behind an imaginary plumb line from the point of his shoulder or hip. Repeat this process three times with all four legs.

Abduction is beneficial to begin with when the horse's stance shows the limbs being pulled by the muscle anatomy away from his midline. Working with the most contracted muscles first, creates the ability of the lesser contracted muscles to be maneuvered in the opposing direction.

Stand on the left side of your horse, facing toward the tail. See *photo 1* Using proper biomechanics for yourself, invite your horse to slowly lift his left fore foot off the ground. Remaining within his comfort zone, guide the leg from the shoulder slightly away from his body. Do not rotate or twist the limb at the shoulder or knee. Once you have reached the amount of movement your horse is comfortable with, pause, slowly return to his neutral place of where the leg hangs from his body then slowly return the foot to the ground allowing your horse to place his foot where it is comfortable for him. Repeat two additional times.

Moving to the hind limb, use the same technique as with the left forelimb by inviting your horse to move through the abduction of his left hindlimb. Take care not to rotate or twist his limb at the hip or hock. Repeat two additional times before moving to the right side of your horse. See *photo 2*

Adduction is used first when your horse's posture has his limbs being pulled toward the midline. It is perfectly normal to have the front limbs require adduction first and his hind



Photo 1
Abduction of the left forelimb. Take care to move the entire leg as one unit as the limb is gently moved away from the midline. This exercise is to relax muscles in the neck, chest and shoulder.



Photo 2
Abduction of the left hindlimb. As the hind limb is gently moved away from the body of the horse use care not to twist or rotate the joints. This exercise is to relax muscle contractions in the hip and hindquarters

limbs benefit from abduction first (or vice versa). Upon occasion it will be required to each of the forelimbs or hind limbs require abduction on one and adduction on the other.

Stand on the left side of your horse facing his tail, invite your horse to lift his foot off of the ground. Gently guide your horse's leg toward his other forelimb. Depending where his muscle may be pulling his leg may go in front, in back or to the middle of his opposite leg. Or you may guide it the first time to the middle, the second lift to the front, and the final time to the back of his opposite leg during his adduction exercise. See *photo 3*

Repeat the adduction of the limbs with the three remaining legs, for three repetitions.



Photo 3
Adduction of the forelimb. Gently move the leg toward the opposite leg from the shoulder to the hoof. Take care not to twist or rotate any portion of the limb. The exercise is to release muscle tension in the neck, chest and shoulder.



Adduction of the hindlimb. Gently move the leg from the hip toward the opposite leg. The leg may move to the center, in front of, or behind the opposite leg. The intent is to release muscle contractions in the hip and hindquarters.

Perform Adduction exercises after Abduction movements, or vice versa, to maintain a balanced body. Once these exercises are complete, take additional photos to compare how your horse may have changed from the beginning of your session to the end of it.

These two movements are part of a full EHS session. For information about some of the additional movements please refer to previous articles beginning in May 2022 or on my website, www.HechterEquineMobility.com.

To purchase a video introduction of EHS please visit, www.HechterEquineMobility.com/video.

To learn more about Equine Hanna Somatics, and to find an equine educator near you, please visit www.EquineHannaSomatics.org.