

REHABILITATION AFTER AN INJURY

Once the cause of the horse's lameness has been diagnosed and is under veterinary treatment, rehabilitation often commences.

First of all the secondary back pain needs to be treated. The physiotherapist would then assess the quality of the horse's gait by walking the horse in a straight line and in a circle on hard and soft surfaces. More often than not, especially after box rest, the abdominal and pelvic muscles are weak and a muscle imbalance is present.

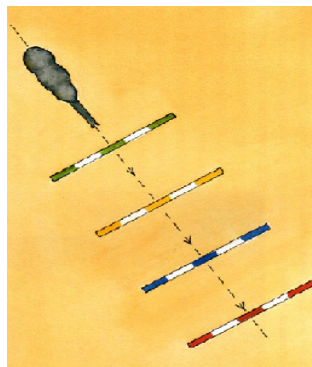
After assessing the gait, the physiotherapist will then proceed with the pole exercises. Following is examples of pole exercises that are normally prescribed by the physiotherapist. Initially, the poles are not raised to ensure the horse can manage the exercises. The exercises are done in hand, then progressed to in hand with a saddle on and later on progressed to ridden. The time this progression will take will depend on how quickly the horse's muscle strengthens up but normally progression occurs after 3 weeks, if the exercises are done 3-5 times a week. The speed of progression will also depend on how long the lameness was present.

The exercises are done in walk only since walking is the best gait to improve the strength of the stability muscles of the pelvis and abdominal area due to the reciprocal action of walking. The exercise will normally be done only on one rein unless a bilateral lameness were present and 6 good repetitions are all that is needed per exercise. "Good repetitions" mean rhythmically, active, without knocking or rushing over the poles.

The pole exercises could also be incorporated in a fit and healthy horse's exercise regime to maintain muscle balance. However it would need to be done on both reins and repeated as well as progressed as describe above.

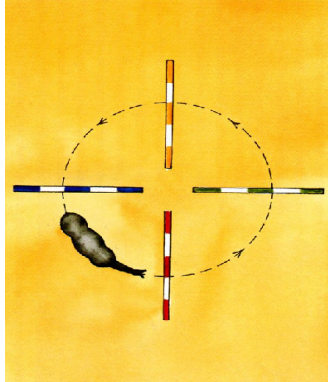
The poles need to be walking distance apart to ensure that the horse has only one stride length between the poles (normally about 3 fairy steps to ensure the horse steps over the first pole with the one leg and the next pole with the next leg)

Exercise 1



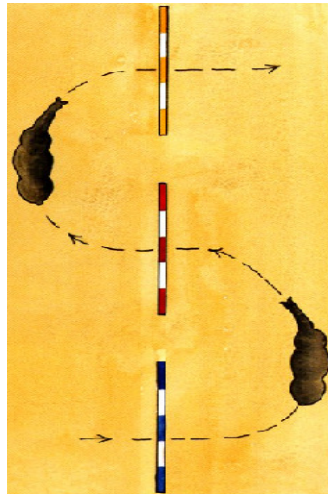
Walk over poles in straight line with right or left side of pole elevated or alternative sides elevated.

Exercise 2



Walk over the poles on left or right rein with the poles elevated at the centre of the circle. Start of with only two poles e.g. red and orange pole on picture.

Exercise 3



Walk over poles e.g. in direction as on picture and have right side of blue pole elevated (as horse is facing pole), right side of red pole elevated (as horse is facing pole) and the same with the orange pole. Therefore the right hind quarters will be working harder. To work the left hind quarters the direction need to be changed so that the left side of the pole is elevated as facing the pole. To progress the exercise, approach the poles as parallel as possible so that the horse needs to step sideways as it is stepping over the pole.