

# Non Ridden and Relaxation

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Before you can help your horse to relax you must learn the art of relaxation.

## Myth - Gentle Relaxed People Can Not Be Super Achievers.

- Culturally we are encouraged to think being hurried, competitive and being able to handle more and more stress is the sign of a super achiever.
- There is a fear that becoming more peaceful, relaxed and calm, achievement of goals will be compromised. Not true.
- People confuse relaxation with being lazy and apathetic. Relaxation is totally different to being lazy and apathetic. They are miles apart.

## Benefits of being relaxed

- It allows you to connect with what really matters in life, inner peace. Inner peace is what is magnetic to horses.
- Centres your energy. Being able to handle more and more stress, uses up a huge amount energy. It drains you.
- Relaxation can enable higher achievement, better communication, open minds and fuel creativity.
- It enables faster, clearer learning plus easier problem solving.
- It takes the drama out of situations.
- Relaxation leads to better understanding, control of emotions, and a balanced state of mind and energy.
- With relaxation you become more aware of everything around you.

**All these turn you become a super achiever.**

## What our Horse Needs

- Horses are drawn to relaxed, peaceful people who can demonstrate calm assertive leadership. How do horses react with people who are hurried, stressed, anxious, fearful, and frantic?
- If you want to be a super achiever in life and with your horse you must firstly learn how to relax, to centre your energy and then become a relaxed calm assertive leader.
- Your horse will look to you for guidance in times when it feels stressed, fearful, anxious, tense, etc.... You have to be the calm relaxed eye in the storm.
- How can you teach your horse to relax if you struggle to relax? You can't. You have to learn first, develop your skills and then you can teach your horse the art of relaxation.
- Your horse already knows how to relax. They practice it every day naturally in the herd. Think about how our interactions have the potential to move our horse out of relaxation?

## What stops you relaxing?

Each of us has some personal inner struggle which prevents us from relaxing. These blocks are what we bring unwittingly to our horsemanship and we see the effects in the partnership with our horse. The horse is like a mirror, reflecting right back at us. Here are a few reasons...of what stops people relaxing.

- Switching off from lives packed with fast paced stimuli, heavy responsibilities, never ending to do list, etc....
- High levels of anxiety, stress, depression from non-equine matters affecting their state of mind and energy, in turn it becomes highly damaging to their equine relationship.
- Lack of confidence or self-esteem. There are many factors that cause a lack of confidence...that is a huge topic. FREE on-line book available on my website.
- Lack of skills. Over horsed. Fear of failure. Perfection paralysis. Fear of lack of control. Peer pressure. Social expectations. Media pressure. Poor relationship with your horse. Health issues Etc...





## Some of my observations

People feel the strong urge to always be doing. We are human beings not human doings....when was the last time you were content with just being with your horse? Do nothing except just be? I see in their horsemanship they are unaware of the impact their busy energy has on their horse. As horse will often reflect right back at you what is going on in your life. Many of us have lost touch with simply being, slowing down, doing nothing, relaxing being calm and finding inner peace.

**Identifying your inner struggle** and what prevents you from relaxing. Here is some simple homework to practice away from your horse: Being bored. I am not talking about being lazy. To sit still until boredom helps you notice your own thoughts, feelings, breathing pattern, inner struggles and your energy. The beauty of this it teaches you to recognize your personal blocks. You can then take personalised targeted action to address these.

**People and horses can actively practice relaxation to get in touch with their mind and balanced energy. It is not easy, it takes time, dedication and seeing it as a priority in life.**

## Relaxation is a technique you can learn and master.

- There are many techniques you can try.
- You should try a few so as to find one that suits you.
- Don't worry if you find it difficult to relax at first.
- It's a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice.
- All relaxation methods help a person to relax, to increase calmness, reduce anxiety, stress, etc...
- Learning to relax has many health benefits including decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathing rates etc....

## Here are a few tips to get you started:-

- Live in the moment. Let go of past and future concerns. When not checked they can lead to energy blocks such as anxiety, stress and frustration.
- Practice being patient. Think of all the daily opportunities.
- Use cognitive behavioural techniques to re-shape your thinking and quiet your mind. Your thoughts are a powerful tool, learn to use them positively.
- Let go of the need to prove yourself to others.
- Stop focusing on the imperfections, flaws, or what needs fixing.
- Stop blaming yourself, others, or your horse and cut yourself some slack.
- Lighten up and learn to have fun.
- Redefine your equine meaningful accomplishments. Remind yourself it is only your horse's opinion that matters.
- Each day give yourself a quiet and peaceful time. Actively relax, there are lots of methods to try, meditation, breathing techniques, visualisation, yoga, exercise, etc... on this download there are several examples for you to try out and master, then try them you're your horse.

**Once you can tap into relaxation you can then teach your horse to relax. This download is designed to get you started. It showcases a few techniques that have meaning in the language of the herd. Once you are more relaxed with a base line of calm relaxation you will be better able feel what is happening with your horse. Then you can teach your horse how to relax. You have to tap into breathing patterns, rhythm, energy, muscle tension and emotional balance.**

# Relaxation Techniques

## Relaxation Breathing Technique

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Horses read each other's and our breathing patterns. They are very finely tuned to pick up a change in breathing. As a prey animal it is part of their language for communicating when it is safe to relax and when to get ready to run. It's a very early warning system that something is wrong. Breathing is an involuntary response. You are not aware most of the time of how you breathe. It's the most natural thing to do. Relaxed people and horses breathe softly and slowly. When we are tense, anxious or fearful our breathing pattern will reflect this. If you do become aware how you breathe and that your horse reads it you can use it to both relax and to enrich your communication with your horse. Refinement of horsemanship involves using core breathing. To be able to do this you need to first develop a neutral breathing pattern and energy.

The relaxation breathing technique is simple and powerful. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing techniques.

The key to deep breathing is to breathe gently and deeply from the abdomen (your core), getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

### How to:

- Practise deep breathing at a regular time and in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.
- Make yourself feel completely comfortable. Sit in a comfy chair which supports your head or lie on the floor or bed.
- To find your lower part of your lungs. Place both hands on the lower part of your chest just at the top of your stomach fingers tips gently touching. When you breathe deeply into this part of your lungs your fingers will be moved slightly apart.
- Once you know which part of your lungs you are going to fill place your arms comfortably on the chair arms, or flat on the floor or bed, a little bit away from the side of your body with the palms up. Get comfortable. If you're lying down, stretch out your legs, keeping them hip-width apart or slightly wider. If you're sitting in a chair, don't cross your legs.
- Fill up the whole of your lungs with air, without forcing. Imagine you're filling up a bottle, so that your lungs fill from the bottom.
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in slowly and regularly counting from one to five (don't worry if you can't reach five at first). Your stomach should rise.
- Then let the breath escape slowly, counting from one to five. Your stomach should move in as you exhale.
- Keep doing this until you feel calm. Breathe without pausing or holding your breath.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.

Practise this relaxed breathing for three to five minutes, two to three times a day (or whenever you feel stressed). Once you have mastered this at home you can do this while with your horse. I get people to quietly walk with their horse using the counting their breathing technique. What they notice as they relax using their breathing exercise so does their horse. Breathing is invisible unless it's a really cold day. So a huge benefit as you can practice it and nobody will know what you are doing.

## Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation Technique

Before practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation, consult with your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. With regular practice, progressive muscle relaxation gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the body. This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.



**Why this is good for horsemanship:** We can easily spot a relaxed horse, muscles soft, eyes soft...etc. It's just as easy to spot a tense horse too. Muscle tension is part of their silent language of the herd to read body tension in their own species and others. The muscle tension or relaxation is alongside body language gestures. Their very survival was dependant on getting this right. Some are so subtle it is easy to miss. Horsemanship is about learning to read and understand this communication. For example a tense horse often has a tense jaw. So do people. For people a tense jaw here is an exercise to try: simply press on the roof of your mouth, behind your front teeth with your tongue then relax. A horse with a tense jaw is telling you he's not happy, he could be anxious, fearful, tense etc....the horsemanship response is to ask why and try to help your horse. Whole body tension is another you will see in horses that struggling, even very subtle tension if missed and you carry on can lead to an undesirable behaviour. Soft relaxed muscles in horse and rider = harmony and fluidity.

How about our own muscle relaxation? How aware are you of tension in your body? Did you know that your own body tension is strongly linked to our state of mind? The Deep Muscle Relaxation technique takes around 20 minutes. It works different muscles in turn and then relaxes them, to release tension from the body and relax your mind.

## How to:

Find a warm, quiet place with no distractions. Get completely comfortable, either sitting or lying down. Close your eyes and begin by focusing on your breathing; breathing slowly and deeply, as described above. If you have pain in certain muscles, or if there are muscles that you find it difficult to focus on, spend more time on relaxing other parts. You may want to play some soothing music to help relaxation. As with all relaxation techniques, deep muscle relaxation will require a bit of practice before you start feeling its benefits. For each exercise, hold the stretch for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat it a couple of times. It's useful to keep to the same order as you work through the muscle groups. Again if you can master this technique at home you can then take it with you when you are with your horse. I find it very useful when helping clients to find a soft, relaxed body and mind. It also helps people locate any areas of tension which in turn will disturb harmony in the saddle.

## You can start from the top or from the toes. Here is from the toes up:

- Get comfortable.
- Take a few minutes to relax with your breathing technique.
- Pay attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels. Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10. Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose. Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- Pay attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through each part your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
- So next is the Right calf
- Then Left calf
- Followed by Right thigh
- Then Left thigh
- Next Hips and buttocks
- Move onto the Stomach
- Then the Chest
- Move to the Back
- Then Right hand
- Followed by Left hand
- Next Right arm
- Move onto Left arm
- Followed by the Neck and shoulders
- And finally the Face.

It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

\* If you are left-handed you may want to begin with your left foot instead.

## Body Scan Technique

A body scan is similar to progressive muscle relaxation except, instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensations in each part of your body.

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Any area we carry tension will affect our horsemanship both on the ground and ridden. Our horse can read our body tension. In the saddle it can block our communication and our horse will feel we are not fluid so it can cause our horse to brace, fix and resist.

### How to:

- Get comfortable.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes.
- Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot.
- After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg.
- From there, move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders.
- Pay close attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort.
- Move your focus to the fingers on your right hand and then move up to the wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, and shoulder.
- Repeat for your left arm.
- Then move through the neck and throat.
- Finally all the regions of your face, the back of the head, and the top of the head. Pay close attention to your jaw, chin, lips, tongue, nose, cheeks, eyes, forehead, temples and scalp. When you reach the very top of your head, let your breath reach out beyond your body and imagine yourself hovering above yourself.
- After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to stretch, if necessary.





## Visualization Technique

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that requires you to employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and sound. When used as a relaxation technique, visualization involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety. You can choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether it's a tropical beach, a favourite childhood spot, or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this visualization exercise on your own in silence, while listening to soothing music, or with a therapist, or an audio recording of a therapist guiding you through the imagery. To help you employ your sense of hearing you can use a sound machine or download sounds that match your chosen setting—the sound of ocean waves if you've chosen a beach, for example.

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Once you can master visualization you can use it in horsemanship. Here is an example: you could worry about any number of outside influences affecting your riding. Left unchecked your imagination can create all sorts of scenarios and nightmares of what may happen. Result is you become tense, anxious, fearful etc... You can use the power of your imagination positively too. For sure you should be aware of your environment for safety sake but no more. Here is a visualization I use: Imagine you and your horse are in a beautiful peaceful clear bubble, you can see through it and all your senses are not affected. Things on the outside of this bubble can only come in if you let them. And you're not going to let them in. Practice being calm and relaxed in your bubble and enjoy being in there with your horse. It's just you and your horse and beautiful relaxing things in with you. The rest of the world is outside. Live in the moment (there is a technique for living in the moment covered later) so if trouble comes towards your bubble, only then do you have to deal with it. When you are calm and relaxed in your bubble you will be able to calmly and confidently deal with whatever approaches you. The benefit is you will not mentally leave your horse, you will stay more connected, be more in control and be happier.

### How to:

Find a quiet, relaxed place.

Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don't select images because someone else suggests them, or because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you.

If you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake, for example: Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colours and textures around you. Spend some time exploring each of your senses. See the sun setting over the water. Hear the birds singing. Smell the pine trees. Feel the cool water on your bare feet. Taste the fresh, clean air.

Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelopes you as you slowly explore your restful place. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present. Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session. This is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle-movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.

## Mindfulness Technique

Mindfulness is the ability to remain aware of how you're feeling right now, your "moment-to-moment" experience—both internal and external. It is about living in the here and now. Thinking about the past—blaming and judging yourself—or worrying about the future can often lead to a degree of stress that is overwhelming. But by staying calm and focused in the present moment, you can bring your nervous system back into balance. Mindfulness can be applied to day to day activities such as walking, exercising, eating, etc.

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** Horses live much more than we do in the here and now. Yes they carry memories positive and negative which the negative experiences can cause them stress when exposed to similar situations. However the difference is they tend not to dwell on it and it tends to surface much more in reaction to what is happening to them in a here and now. Our job is to help our horse to be emotionally balanced and to be able to cope with those issues.

### How to:

- Choose a secluded place with no distractions or interruptions.
- Get comfortable.
- Select a point of focus. This point can be internal – a feeling or imaginary scene – or something external - a flame, a beautiful stone, or meaningful word or phrase that you repeat it throughout your session.
- You can do this with eyes open or closed.
- An observant, noncritical attitude. Don't worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you're doing. If thoughts intrude during your relaxation session, don't fight them. Instead, gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.



## Rhythmic Exercise Technique

Running, horse riding, walking, cycling etc... can relieve stress when performed with relaxation in mind. You must be fully engaged in the present moment, focusing your mind on how your body feels right now. As you exercise, focus on the physicality of your body's movement and how your breathing complements that movement. If your mind wanders to other thoughts, gently return to focusing on your breathing and movement.

**Why this is good for horsemanship:** A great one to do in the saddle it unlocks levels of refinement in horsemanship. As you can connect with your horse, how it's body moves, it's foot fall, it's energy, and emotional state of mind. You can learn to move as one. With groundwork your horse will tap into rhythm, you can influence your horse's rhythm with your own. Horses are hard wired to read rhythm and will love to take direction from very subtle rhythmic changes. Learning to use rhythm in relaxing with your horse adds a whole new dimension to your horsemanship.

### How to:

- Let's pick walking. You can do this easily and once mastered have a go with your horse in hand.
- Start with your breathing exercise.
- Then focus on each step.
- The physical sensations of your feet touching the ground and how your body moves.
- Notice the rhythm of your breathing while moving.
- Relaxed people walked relaxed. Practice walking relaxed. Mosey along.
- Get into a relaxed rhythm. The pace you move at has a direct relationship with the way you feel. Slow down your movements and you will feel more relaxed.
- Enjoy the feeling of the wind against your face, if you're lucky the sun on your back.
- Notice the beautiful sounds of birds, wind in the trees etc.



The trick is to make relaxation techniques a part of your life and valuing relaxation. The best way to start and maintain a relaxation practice is to incorporate it into your daily routine. Between work, family, school, and other commitments, though, it can be tough for many people to find the time. Fortunately, many of the techniques can be practiced while you're doing other things. I haven't covered every technique so there are lots more you can try.

## Final Thoughts to Ponder

- Worry when the time comes. Most worries are about future concerns that may or may not happen. Concentrate on the here and now.
- Prune or banish pressure phrases. Phrases like 'I have to' 'I must' 'I should' fuel pressure and stress. Listen to your words and thoughts and replace them with more relaxed phrases 'I may' 'I choose to' 'I will make time to' etc...
- Watch out for tense people. Time spent with tense anxious people can be infectious.
- Know when to stop. If stress levels are rising, stop, take a break, do something else.
- Make peace with imperfection. It's ok for things to not be perfect. The perfection stick is one we beat ourselves with and it is highly damaging.
- Be aware of your thinking and use it positively.
- Be more patient.
- Surrender to the fact life isn't fair.
- Allow yourself to be bored.
- Lower your tolerance to stress. You were not put on this earth to live under stress, learn to say no.
- Most things are not an emergency.
- Look beyond your horse's behaviour and ask why.
- Seek to understand.
- Do one thing at a time.
- Practice being calm and relaxed – being the eye in the storm.
- Be flexible with your plans.
- Think as problems as golden opportunities in works clothing.
- Cut yourself and your horse some slack.
- Ask yourself what is a meaningful accomplishment from my horse's view point.
- Listen to your gut instinct and your feelings. If something doesn't feel right the chances are it isn't.
- If someone throws you a ball you don't have to catch it.
- It takes time. Things will only happen at a pace you and your horse are comfortable with.
- Lighten up and have fun. Smile. A smile is relaxing and helps you to feel good.

**These relaxation resources are not a replacement for professional support. They are designed to be used alongside regular lessons from a professional horsemanship practitioner. Horses that struggle to relax, that are tense, anxious, fearful, stressed etc... can be unpredictable and dangerous.**