

Restoring Balance and Structural Integrity

by Lisa Derby Oden

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"I pulled my favorite wool sweater out of the closet only to discover that it had somehow slipped off the hanger it had been carefully suspended from and snagged itself on a closet hook," begins Karen Miller, who is certified in Equine Natural Movement. "The snag from the hook had contorted the fibers of the sweater in such a way that the left side pulled out like a cone-nosed alien and the right side puckered in like a moon crater. I put the sweater on hoping my body would encourage it back to its original form."

"I looked absurd and felt uncomfortable all day because I couldn't move without the sweater rubbing and pulling on my skin. When I took it off I was able to gently rework the woven fibers until the sweater looked and felt symmetrical. Form and function returned. The sweater had structural integrity again!"

Karen continues, "Imagine the sweater as an expansive and intricately woven physiological system that could cover a horse's body just below the skin. This biological system is real. It is called fascia and is the horse's connective tissue system. The fascia connects and surrounds everything in the horse's body, surrounding and separating each individual muscle, muscle groups, and even the layers of muscles. Equine fascia is the horse's structural support system, covering and supporting the horse's whole body."

"Puckers and pulls in the continuous fibers of equine fascia are the result of physical and emotional traumas to the tissue. These traumas, acute or chronic, cause varying tension patterns that can pull a horse's body out of its own natural balance. Equine Natural Movement bodywork helps reestablish natural balance and natural movement. It works by releasing superficial tensions in the body that point to deeper tension patterns that lock a horse into compromised movement.

"During sessions key areas of the body are freed up, than carefully integrated back together. This allows the horse to find its natural freedom and flexibility and to use its body as a whole without having to rely on the compensatory movement that prevented him from moving the way he is designed to move. When form and function return, the horse has structural balance again!"



Karen Miller works to identify tension patterns in this horse's neck.

The Equine Natural Movement Series has applications for performance horses that are in training and competition, recreational horses that are used for pleasure and trail riding, and horses that are in rehabilitation for injury.

Irene Novy shares her story about her trail horse ...

"Rosey is my 12 year old Quarter Horse/Morgan mare. Over the past few weeks of riding I noticed that her stride was short and she would always swing her head to the right, especially when walking down hills. Karen Miller started her sessions on Rosey. I was a bit skeptical how such a small woman was going to help such a large animal with just her hands. Each of the sessions was well over an hour in length. I have never seen such a positive response. The day after the first session Rosey was very slow moving in her paddock. By day two she was running, kicking and playing. When I took her for a trail ride her stride lengthened and she no longer swung her head to the right.

The friend I ride with noticed that Rosey's right hip was dipping lower than the left, again, more pronounced going downhill. As the sessions with Karen continued, you could see, hear and feel the results of the Equine Natural Movement work. By the end of the fifth session Rosey no longer took short strides after warm up, her head stopped swinging to the right, and her hips were even.

The benefits my horse reaped from Equine Natural Movement were amazing. Rosey is much more comfortable, her performance has improved dramatically and she genuinely enjoys going out for her trail rides."



As Karen works, the horse drops her head much lower. This release of tension means greater flexibility and freer movement.

Equine Natural Movement Series training is currently offered through the Bancroft School of Massage Therapy, in Worcester MA, and at Friendly Haven Rise Farm in southwest Washington. Joseph Freeman, Certified Structural Integrator, is the creator of the Equine Natural Movement Series. He and other faculty members provide the instruction.

He says, "The Equine Natural Movement Series is a specialized method of somatic education that balances the horse's structure bilaterally and front to back and gives the horse a better relationship with gravity. The series educates the horse's nervous system and connective tissue system by rebalancing and repatterning the way he uses his whole body. Through the sessions, the horse becomes aware of himself in a new way that is more natural.

The benefits of The Equine Natural Movement Series are graceful movement; optimal overall performance; power and strength through efficient use; greater precision; and a pervasive sense of bodily comfort and ease for the horse.

The Equine Natural Movement Series repatterns the structure of the horse's body. "A balanced horse uses his muscles in harmony rather than one side working to compensate for the restrictions of the other."

Horse owner Beth Weidman had Equine Natural Movement sessions for her pleasure horse. She says, "How wonderful to know about such a helpful method of healing. I can hear the local horses collectively sighing in relief that tension can be relieved and their bodies can finally be balanced."

To contact NH practitioner Karen Miller (Hair of the Dog Farm) in New Ipswich, NH, call 603-878-4879. www.evenequine.com.

Visit the school's website at www.EquineNaturalMovement.com.