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**Franklin Method Equestrian Level 1 (Spine, Leg, Pelvis) Centered Riding Level 2**

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Below are exercises to help improve your riding. Please consult your physician before starting any new exercise plans and make sure that your body does not have any ailments or restrictions. All exercises are done at your own risk, with variations and modifications available for all. Start light with any weights and adjust reps and sets as needed and increase as you get stronger! Some require machines, weights, or just body weight. Again, modifications can be made!

If you do not know an exercise, YouTube is an amazing resource! Many videos can be found with different variations.

**Core:** Core is more than just your abs, it is also your lower back and psoas muscles. Keep all this strong to support your horse. It is important to do both dynamic and static core exercises.

Examples: flutter kicks, 6 inch hold, Russian twists, planks (many variations), ab roller, bicycle crunch, mountain climbers, abdominal bridge, ankle tap push-ups, balance chop, bent leg jackknife, bird dogs

**Back:** If our horses need to engage their backs (aka topline) shouldn’t we do it too!? A supportive back allows the hands and arms to stay soft to supple our horses, while the back (and core) are engaged. Especially with our latissimus and deltoid muscles, when those are strong, supportive and engaged, we are able to half halt through those muscles instead of our hands, allowing again for our hands to stay soft and free.

Examples: Lat pull downs, seated row, dumbbell row, sumo deadlift, pull ups, supermans, band pull apart, balance chop, back extensions, bear walk, bent over row (and press), bird dogs, bow and arrow pull, cobra lat pulldown, crab kicks, crab toe touches

**Chest/Arms:** When we think of our horses’ chests, we want them to lift, carry, and engage to create an uphill balance. We must also be able to do this in ourselves and carry our chests upright and tall. Arms are also included in this section because many exercises incorporate more than one part of our body. With our arms, we want to focus on every muscle, but I have found the triceps to be extra important. Our triceps help to support our horses and are a part of our “top line” muscles. Activated triceps allow us to keep our lower arms and hands soft, while the triceps can make the bigger adjustments. When working triceps, start very light! You do not need much to get these muscles working!

Examples: dumbbell bench press, push ups (modify as needed), chest fly, tricep bench dip, tricep extension, tricep kickbacks, dumbbell curls, dumbbell should press, butterfly dips, chest fly glute bridge, chest press, dumbbell pullover, chest stretch, cross chest curl, hammer curls, up down plank

**Legs:** As riders, we are often over developed on our inner thigh muscles, and underdeveloped on our hamstrings and gluteal muscles. These exercises will help to even that out. Strong hamstring and gluteal muscles help to support riders while jumping, posting the trot, and sitting any gaits.

Examples: calf extension, hamstring curl, squats of many different variations, butterfly hip thrust, resistance band hip thrust, lunges of many different variations, air squat, box step ups of various heights, kettle bell swings, donkey kicks

**Cardio:** Depending on what stage of riding we are in, and how our horse is acting, riding is both aerobic and anaerobic when we consider our heart rate and cardio fitness. It is important to work both of these, especially if your goals are to jump longer courses, gallop distances, or just want to keep your breathing in sync and not feel winded after trotting or cantering. These exercises can all be done to your version of “pushing” your heart rate. Many people have smart watches or other heart rate monitors right on their wrists, use it! The difference in aerobic and anaerobic exercises is simple. Aerobic utilizes oxygen you breathe in, instead of needing the energy stored within your body. During anaerobic exercises, oxygen consumption is not sufficient to supply the energy demands being placed on your muscles. This causes your muscles to break down sugars, which results in higher lactic acid production that will need to be stretched out later.

Aerobic Examples: Long and slow cardio exercises where your heart rate stays low, helps to create endurance and cardiac health, brisk walks, long and slow hikes, casual bike rides

Anaerobic Examples: High heart rate to burn fat and gain lean muscle mass, 400m running sprint, running/cycling in a high heart rate, swimming sprints, HIIT training

Other cardio exercises with tons of value that will get your heart rate going! Pick 2 or 3 and see how many you can do in 10-15 minutes. This is called an AMRAP, “as many reps as possible.” Do the circuit as many times as possible!

Examples to combine: burpees, air squats, high knees, jump rope, push-ups, rowing, squat thrusters, box step ups, push press, mountain climbers, wall balls, wall sits, jumping jacks

**Stretches**: We ALL need to be stretching more! Adding anything into your daily activity is beneficial. Here you can really cater to what your body needs each day. Below is just a small list of examples, the possibilities are endless.

Examples: yoga, TRE, shake out, toe touches, butterfly, pigeon, runner’s lunge, standing hamstring stretch, child’s pose, hip circles, arm circles, wall pec stretch

**What I have learned for my horses being an athlete:** There’s nothing easy about wanting to change a body, whether it’s your own or your horses. Throughout this journey I have been on, I have learned more than I can put down here. A few points have stood out:

Muscles under tension: When we engage a muscle, and keep it engaged, that is a muscle under tension. We do it in our own bodies and feel it through the stress it puts our body under. When our horses engage and keep engaging, we can often get excited, and feel the positives rather than the stresses that the horse is feeling. When a horse gives us a big push or power moment, enjoy it, build it, but do not take advantage of it. Imagine a strength trainer that wants you to hold a weight and keep holding it, and then keep holding it more, all because your form is good, or you look good. At some point, form will go away, and you will fall apart. It just happens. That is the same with our horses until strength is built. Put muscles under tension, be happy for the effort, and then reward with a break. This will keep your horse mentally positive and happy to play your game.

Keep everything fun and a game: When we have fun, we stay motivated. For us, that may be playing soccer with a bunch of friends, joining a local run club, or doing group exercise classes. For our horses, its variety. The same work in the indoor may come alive outside. Many of the things you ask your horse to do in an arena can be done on the trails or a field.

Variety: When we do the same thing over and over again, our muscles are not able to recover. Each day choose a different muscle group for yourself. With our horses, that can be done in many different ways. Maybe one day a week is jumping/raised poles, another day is lots of high quality walk and trot, with a bigger canter day on a different day, and then at least one or two days for stretching. I vary my training throughout the week to allow my body to recover and give the best efforts possible. Same with my training horses.

Progressive loading: When planning your horse’s training regiment, give them time to work less. When training for triathlons, I would train for a week at 60% capacity, then 70%, then 80%, and then 50%. That 50% week was active recovery for all of the work I just did. This applies to our horses (and ourselves) as we look to build fitness. As long as you are doing something, it is ok to have some “down time.”

**Rider Warmup Exercises**

Please complete one lap of each exercise while walking on your horse. Use discretion for the safety of you and your horse.

1. Roll ankles in circles both directions
2. Roll shoulders forward and backward
3. Twisty spine
4. Walking hips
5. Neck rolls and circles
6. Left and right arm raises
7. Quad stretches
8. Standing stretch
9. Knee up heel down

\*Optional\*

1. Walking with knees in front of your saddle

**Resources I have used:**

* Spotebi Fitness & Nutrition: illustrations for each exercise, workout plans
* Yoga by Adriene (or any of your preferred yoga platforms)
* Haybales & Barbells: exercises plans
* TRE: Trauma and Stress Relief Exercises
* Franklin Method Equestrian: dynamic imagery to improve your riding
* Centered Riding: mindful riding
* Find resources you connect to and that inspire you to move on social media