

DRESSAGE, EVENTING, HUNTERS, JUMPERS

VOL. 27

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ALL ABOUT THAT BASE!

Improve your performance by strengthening your base of support.



The stronger your base of support is, the straighter you'll be able to carry your upper body and the softer and steadier you can be in your hands. Here, West Point Cadet Matilda Brady's good lower-leg position is supporting her quiet upper body and hands—even without stirrups. The proof is in 26-year-old Thoroughbred/warmblood-cross Aberdeen's relaxed, content expression.

By Sherry Cashman ■ Photos by Amy K. Dragoo

Great equitation requires a great base of support. By that I mean your lower body position is solid and strong from your feet to your waist. The ball of your foot is balanced nicely on your stirrup iron and your weight is down in your heel. We equitation trainers feel like broken records constantly reminding students to put their “Heels down!” But there's a good reason: It all starts with your heels. If they're far enough down, your feet will stay steady on the stirrups and you'll be able to keep your balance.

Working up from the heels, we want to see your lower legs steady against your horse's sides just behind the girth, never slipping forward or backward. Your knees should operate as a pivot point so that their angles open and close, for example, when posting to the trot. They should stay in light contact with the saddle without gripping. Your thighs provide the strength necessary to either hold your seat in the saddle—for example, at the sitting trot—or support your upper body when it's out of the saddle in two-point or jumping position. At the same time, your core abdominal and seat (buttock) muscles constantly work to correct your balance and hold you in the middle of the saddle.

Why do you need this strong base of support? For starters, it'll save you from “eating dirt”—it's the safety net that keeps you from falling off when the going gets tough. But that's just the worst-case scenario. Whether you're in the show ring or not, every aspect of your riding performance goes hand in hand with a good base of support. Here's how:

Your heels, legs, seat and core muscles act like an anchor for your upper body, helping you to sit up straight—without being too tight or frozen in the saddle—while staying soft and steady in your arms and hands. They also absorb all the bouncing of your horse's movements so it doesn't channel up through your arms into your hands and his mouth. This makes your



Evaluate Your Base

Start by checking your stirrup length, which can play a major role in the stability of your support base. Every rider's conformation is slightly different, but my general rule of thumb for riding on the flat is that the irons hit your ankle bones when you sit in the saddle with your feet out of the stirrups and your legs stretched long against your horse's sides. If you're on a narrow horse who doesn't have much curve in his barrel to take up your leg, you might need to shorten your stirrups a hole or two. If you're on a wide-barreled horse, you will probably need a slightly longer stirrup in order to stretch your legs down and around his belly.

Either way, you'll know if you have the right length when you feel most balanced, secure and effective in the saddle. If you feel your body tipping forward like a jockey's, your stirrups may be too short. If you're reaching for your stirrups, balancing on your toes and hav-

Evaluate Your Base

1. To evaluate your base of support, start by checking that your stirrups are the correct length. Take your feet out of them and allow your legs to hang down by your horse's sides. In general, the bottoms of the stirrup irons should be about level with your ankles for flatwork.

2. Next, ask a friend on the ground to analyze your leg position when your feet are in the stirrups. As German exchange student Cadet Merle Kreye is demonstrating here, your stirrup should be on the ball of your foot and your ankle flexed so your heel is deep. Your legs should be positioned so that your heels are directly underneath your hips. Merle is showing a good stirrup length for flatting here. She would typically shorten her stirrups a hole for jumping.

3. Ask your helper to check your leg from all angles to be sure your thighs, knees and calves are evenly closed around the horse as Merle's are here. This allows you to use your entire leg for stability and support.

rides more comfortable and enjoyable for both you and your horse. It also creates a more pleasant picture for the judge.

Most importantly, a good base of support helps you stay centered and balanced in the saddle so you're never tempted to use your reins for balance. This enables you to develop a kind, effective connection with your horse, so you can influence

his balance and ride him in a nice frame. This, in turn, will help you regulate his pace and rhythm and find better distances to your fences.

Sound too good to be true? I promise you, it's not. Many of my students over the years have used the exercises I'll share with you in this article to develop a strong, secure base of support.

ing trouble keeping your heels down, your stirrups are likely too long. Keep adjusting them until they feel just right.

In general, I recommend shortening your flatting stirrup length by a hole or two for jumping. This will vary depending on the spacing between holes on your leathers (some are much closer than others).

Next, ask a friend to video you or take a

Unmounted Exercise 1: Stair Stretch

If you have trouble keeping your heels down, this exercise can make a big difference. Although Cadet Charlotte Hereford is demonstrating it here on a mounting block, it's ideally done on stairs with a banister. Stand on the edge of a step with your heels hanging over the edge. Lightly rest one hand on the wall or railing if necessary to maintain your balance. Then, keeping your back straight, flex your ankles to allow your heels to drop below the level of the step. You should feel your calf muscles stretching. Hold this position for about 10 seconds, then step off the stairs and rest for a moment. Repeat this 10 times.



Unmounted Exercise 2: Ball Squeeze

Find a ball that's 1 to 3 feet in diameter (a soccer ball, basketball, etc.). Standing on flat ground, place it between your knees and/or thighs. Bend your hips and knees slightly so you're in a squatting position as if you were in the saddle in two-point position. Squeeze the ball with both legs for 10 seconds, then relax. Repeat 10 times.

pinching with your knees.

After analyzing your position, try to compare it to successful upper-level riders—in your own barn or at competitions. Watch how their base of support

Longe Lessons

One of my favorite training methods for riders of all levels is the longe lesson. This is a great way for riders to work on their positions without pulling on their horses' mouths accidentally. You need to have an instructor or ground helper who is skilled at longeing and a quiet horse who is experienced, forgiving and comfortable on the longe line. Not all horses tolerate riders bouncing on their backs or stirrups bumping against their sides. If you plan to do any riding without stirrups, test your horse ahead of time without a rider. Longe him with the stirrups down, starting at the walk, then build up to the trot and canter.

When you begin your mounted longe session, knot your reins and loop them over your horse's neck so they don't fall down around his legs. Throughout the session, either put your hands on your hips or hold your arms straight out to the sides, level with your shoulders.

Start with a slow posting trot, focusing on keeping your back straight and your body centered over the middle of the horse. When that's going well, try to sit the trot. Have your longe person slow down your horse as much as necessary

series of photos while you ride. Review these images carefully to analyze your position from the bottom up. Where is the stirrup positioned on your foot? If it's under your toe instead of the ball of your foot, you can't achieve maximum lower-leg stability. Are your heels truly down? Do they stay down all the time or do they come up now and then depending on what you're doing? If your case is the latter, your balance is probably equally unreliable.

Does your lower leg stay in position or does it swing backward or forward? If it swings, notice how predictably your upper body tips in the opposite direction. When your leg swings backward, your upper body tips forward and vice versa. Can you see daylight between your calves and your horse's sides? That's a sign that you're

stays the same throughout an entire ride. Then try to mimic their riding styles during your own practice.

Meanwhile, work to strengthen and stabilize your base with the mounted and unmounted exercises I describe in this article. Build up slowly. If you do these exercises to the point of exhaustion, your body won't be able to maintain the correct position we're trying to teach it. You also might make your muscles so sore that you won't be able to ride properly in your next session. So if you feel yourself getting tired, call it a day. Over time, as the exercise becomes easier, gradually increase the duration and number of reps.

Check out the boxes above and to the left for more details on two unmounted exercises I teach my students.

Sitting Trot with One Hand on the Pommel

To learn how to sit the trot with a secure, yet following seat, put both reins in your outside hand and hold the pommel with your inside hand. Now you can pull your seat deeper into the saddle. Note how Matilda is maintaining a nice leg position, with weight in her heel, while keeping her back straight and tall.



for you to sit the gait comfortably. Wrap your legs around your horse's sides to draw your seat down into the saddle. If you're a beginner or intermediate rider, there might be some bouncing involved. That's OK! Everybody has to get through this phase.

To get a better idea of what a good sitting trot should feel like, grasp the pommel of the saddle with your inside hand and pull your seat down deeper into the saddle. If you feel your back rounding, tighten your

Serpentine Notes

While you ride the serpentine exercise below, periodically check that your leg is still in the correct position. The steadier it is and the more centered your body is, the more balanced your horse will be and the easier it will be to steer him through the exercise.

Over time, challenge yourself by adding more poles and bringing them slightly closer together so the serpentine has more loops and the turns are tighter. Never bring them so close together, though, that you lose the balance and flow of the exercise. If you're more advanced, challenge yourself by riding the serpentine without stirrups at the posting and sitting trot.

Serpentine with Poles

Put a line of four or five ground poles down the center of your arena, placed end to end and spaced about 30 to 40 feet apart. Then ride a serpentine at the posting trot, making four or five wide, smooth loops, almost touching the rail each time you approach the sides of the arena.

1. In between each loop, trot straight across the arena and over the center of one of the ground poles as Cadet Alex Vinson is doing here on Ellie, a 15-year-old warmblood. She's straightened Ellie well and is keeping her balanced and steady, but I'd like to see her hip angle slightly more open, her heel a little deeper and her fingers more closed around the reins.

2. Although Alex's well-ridden straight line brings her to the center of the pole, her base of support is slipping a little. Her heel has come up and her leg has slid in front of her body, which makes her shoulders tip forward. She'll have time to correct this as she

continues heading straight toward the other side of the ring and prepares to make the next loop in the serpentine.

3. As she approaches the rail, she drops her weight deeper into her heels, which helps to keep her body upright as she rides a nice smooth loop to the left. Notice how she's resisted the temptation to lean to the inside. I'd still like to see her heel a little deeper, her weight lower in the tack and her hands holding the reins with her thumbs on top, but that will come with practice. She's doing a good job of turning her head to aim for the center of the next pole as she completes the turn.

4. As a result, she and Ellie arrive at the pole in a much better rhythm and balance than they had over the previous pole. Alex's lower leg is back in the correct position and she's maintaining a better rein contact. She's already looking ahead, planning to ride a straight line to the rail where she'll initiate the next smooth loop.





Sherry Cashman started her equestrian education at the Thomas School of Horsemanship on Long Island. She studied equine science at Delhi University before attending the Kentucky Equine Educational Program at

the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. She became a harness-racing trainer and driver and met her husband, Peter, a fellow driver (pictured with Sherry). Together they switched career paths 30 years ago by accepting jobs at the U.S. Military Academy. Since then, they have coached West Point cadets in intercollegiate competitions in hunt seat equitation as well as Western riding. They also manage and train the academy's traditional mule team. For the last 12 years, Sherry has also coached the James I. O'Neill High School equestrian team.

Each of their children, Shane, Randi and Shelby, showed horses growing up. After competing on Centenary College's equestrian team, Randi and Shelby followed in their parents' footsteps, becoming trainers at Saddle River Equestrian, near New York City.

abdominal muscles. Try to stay with your horse's motion as much as possible. This will take a certain amount of strength in your legs and core muscles. Be careful not to tighten your muscles so much that you become stiff in the saddle, essentially working against your horse's motion. Your body still needs to stay somewhat soft and flowing to work effectively in the saddle. Finding that happy medium is just a matter of practice—and lots of it.

If you're feeling comfortable sitting the trot without reins, try dropping your stirrups as well. Slip your feet out of the stirrups and let the irons hang loose. Maintain the exact same leg position you had with stirrups: just behind the girth with your heel lower than your toe and your lower legs closed against your horse's sides. It can be tempting to dangle your toes down toward the ground and let your legs flop around, but this won't improve your equitation skills. This is also good practice for both you and your horse in case you lose a stirrup temporarily in the show ring. While you're recovering your stirrup, you want to be able to carry on without distracting your horse or disrupting your performance.

Many riders find it easier to sit the trot without stirrups than with stirrups because it forces them to balance on their seats rather than the stirrup irons. It's still great strength training, though, for your legs, seat and core. In the beginning, you might be able to do just a few minutes at a time, but you can build up to riding an

Drop Your Stirrups Over Trot Poles

Next, take the ground poles you used in the previous exercise and turn them parallel to one another to create trot poles on the centerline. Space them 4 to 5 feet apart, depending on your horse's natural trot stride (farther apart if he has a big stride; closer together if he's shorter-strided). Ask a ground person to stand by to adjust the poles however necessary so your horse can comfortably trot through them without having to lengthen or shorten his stride.

1. Matilda begins the exercise by riding down the long side of the arena in a posting trot. She then turns Aberdeen down the centerline, aiming for the middle of the poles. They arrive in a nice balance, but Matilda's leg has slipped too far back. I'd also like to see her heel a little deeper and her hands slightly lower.

She continues posting over the poles and then trots straight to the end of the arena before making a smooth turn back onto the rail in the direction opposite her original approach. This way she

can alternate turning right and left onto the centerline each time she repeats the exercise.

2. After doing this several times, she drops her stirrups before reaching the first trot pole. She continues posting over the poles just as she did before, trying to keep her legs in the same correct position. Her hip angle could be slightly more closed here—and we've caught her looking down—but otherwise she's maintaining an excellent steady position.

After the last pole, she'll sit the trot and find her stirrups again before going back to posting. She'll also check to be sure she's on the correct diagonal for the upcoming turn.

This exercise is great for strengthening your base of support and also good practice for quickly recovering your stirrups—a skill that comes in handy if you lose one in the show ring and don't want to attract the judge's attention to your rooting around to find it. If you are an advanced rider, try this at the sitting trot, too.



entire session without stirrups.

Posting without stirrups is another excellent exercise. To challenge yourself even more, try sitting for one beat and standing for two beats. Do this with stirrups at first and then, if you feel strong enough, try it without stirrups. Concentrate on using your legs to push your seat out of the saddle rather than pull your body up by your shoulders. Since you're constantly changing your posting,

don't worry about your diagonal during this exercise.

More Mounted Exercises

All of the longeing exercises described can be done during your regular rides, too. For these—and all your other work—be very careful never to use your reins for balance. Periodically go through a mental checklist of the components of your base, always starting with your heels

and working your way up to your abs.

More exercises to sharpen up your core include serpentines over ground poles, dropping your stirrups over trot poles and jumping without stirrups. Turn to the photos on pages 6–7 and below for tips on how to ride them effectively.

Whatever your riding goals, keep practicing these exercises. The stronger your base of support is, the stronger your performances will be. 🐾

Jumping Without Stirrups

Safety always comes first in our barn so our riders jump without stirrups only if they're experienced over fences and mounted on quiet, trustworthy horses. The key is to start very small and work your way up slowly. Begin with a single ground pole on either long side of the arena. First ride over the poles at the posting trot with your stirrups, then do it without.

1. You can also practice trotting over poles on a circle as Alex is doing here with Ellie. (To see a video describing this particular exercise in more detail, go to www.PracticalHorsemanMag.com.) She's leaning slightly to the inside here, so she'll practice this a few more times before dropping her stirrups.

When doing this at the trot feels good, progress to canter, first with your stirrups, then without.

Most horses will simply step over the poles rather than jump them, so there's no need to give a big rein release. Just stay soft in your arms, always following your horse's mouth with your hands no matter what he does. Also remain "in the tack," following his motion with your seat just as if you were riding a regular smooth, flowing canter without poles.

Next, try a line of two poles, placed several strides apart. Ask a helper on the ground to adjust the poles to suit your horse's natural stride length.

2. Eventually, build up to jumping small cavalletti and crossrails without stirrups. Ride over each jump in the same steady manner you would use if you had your stirrups—the same pace and line in your approach, the same release in the air. Cadet Rachael Schloo is demonstrating how to do this on Aberdeen. As she comes out of the turn to a small crossrail, she drops her stirrups. She's doing a good job of keeping her heels down, but her lower leg could be a hair farther back and her shoulders could be more open.

3. In the air over the crossrail, Rachael is pinching with her knee instead of using her calf. This allows her leg to swing backward and causes her hips to move too far forward. To compensate, she's

tilting her head backward. Her shoulders still need to be more open and I'd like to see more release through her hands. All of these things will improve as she continues to strengthen her base of support.

4. If you feel comfortable over cavalletti and crossrails, try jumping small fences (at heights several inches lower than your usual show height). Over each jump, concentrate on keeping your butt underneath you and your legs wrapped around your horse's barrel. Many riders find that their lower legs slip backward when they jump without stirrups. This, in turn, causes their upper bodies to tip forward. So try to hold your lower leg steady and in position.

This is harder than it looks! Merle is doing a good job here staying with Ellie's motion, but you can see that her lower leg has come loose and her knee angle has straightened. This has pushed her body too far out of the tack and made her lose some of the rein contact. (Having said that, I'd rather see a rider let her reins get loopy in the air over a fence than catch her horse in the mouth.) Next time, she'll work on tightening her calf on her horse's side and bending her knee so she can keep her body closer to the saddle. That will give her the stability necessary to maintain a more even rein contact. I'll also remind her to keep her eyes open!



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¹Townsend L. Horse flies and deer flies. University of Kentucky ENTFACT-511.



SUMMER SORES

The incidence of these lesions is on the rise. Learn why this worm-related condition should be on your radar and how to prevent it.

By Elaine Pascoe with D. G. Pugh, DVM



Although still rare, summer sores (above) are becoming more common, in part due to warm weather that comes earlier and stays longer than in years past.

It started with a superficial cut—just a scratch, really—on your horse's pastern. You cleaned it up and didn't think much more about it. But the cut didn't heal and now, weeks later, it's an oozing, festering mess. Your horse keeps biting and rubbing it, so you know it's driving him nuts. What is going on?

If you've been around horses for anything less than 30 years, you can be forgiven for not recognizing the condition long known as a summer sore. Since the mid-1980s these sores have become extremely rare, "so rare that veterinarians who graduated after that time might never have seen one and might not recognize it," says D. G. Pugh, DVM, a professor in the department of pathobiology at the Auburn University College of

Veterinary Medicine and director of the Alabama Department of Agriculture Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory System.

Summer sores are still rare, he adds. But reports of cases have increased in the last three to four years. If your horse has a sore that won't heal, the condition should be on your radar. The good news is that a summer sore will heal with the right care. Even better, these sores can be prevented. To know how, it helps to understand how they form.

Parasites Off Course

A summer sore results from a wrong turn in the life cycle of certain stomach worms. These worms (*Habronema* and *Draschia* species) are not the most dangerous internal parasites of horses—as adults they live in the horse's stomach and rarely cause serious harm. "Their larvae, however, can be associated with problems," says Dr. Pugh.

The adult worms produce eggs that are shed in the horse's manure and quickly hatch. The tiny larvae that emerge have to get back into a horse to complete their life cycle, and they need help for that. Their accomplices are maggots—the larvae of house, face and stable flies—that live in manure. Maggots ingest the worm larvae as they feed, and the worm larvae develop inside the maggots as the maggots develop into adult flies.

As adults, the flies are drawn to the secretions around the horse's mouth, eyes, nostrils, wounds and other openings. When they land to feed at these places, the larvae sense the moisture and bail out. Lucky larvae find themselves near the mouth, are swallowed by the horse and mature into adult worms in the stomach. But trouble starts when the worm larvae are deposited in other areas—in a wound, say, or on moist membranes around the eyes, the sheath or the vulva.



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LEFT: When deposited in a horse's wound or on his moist membranes, worm larvae cause local inflammation and intense itching.

ABOVE: Flies, which carry the worm larvae, are drawn to the secretions around a horse's wounds, mouth, eyes, nostrils and other openings.

© PAUL DA SILVA/ARND NI

The larvae are at a dead end in these places because they can't get to the horse's stomach; but they keep trying, migrating through the tissue at the spot. As long as they have moisture they can survive, causing local inflammation and intense itching. The horse may bite or rub the area in an effort to relieve the itch, but that just makes the problem worse. The result is a raw, swollen lesion, oozing blood-tinged fluid and filled with reddish, lumpy granulation tissue, like the proud flesh that can develop when skin doesn't close over a wound. White or yellowish granules of calcified material may be sprinkled through the tissue.

These sores, technically known as habronemiasis, were a familiar problem before the deworming agent ivermectin was introduced in the early 1980s in North America. Ivermectin, moxidectin and other drugs in their class turned out to be highly effective against the stomach worms whose larvae cause the sores, and widespread, routine use of the drugs dramatically reduced their numbers. But they were not wiped out.

"Deworming kills these parasites, but not 100 percent of them. If there are adult worms in a horse's stomach,

they can produce eggs. If larvae are in the manure, some fly larvae can serve as intermediate hosts to these stomach worms," Dr. Pugh says. It's not clear why more sores have started to appear now. For some theories, see the box on page 12. Some horses seem more prone to summer sores than others, he adds. These horses may be hypersensitive to the parasite larvae—more likely if they have adult worms living in the stomach—or they may have a genetic susceptibility.

What To Do

A summer sore will rarely heal on its own. These sores usually appear in spring and summer, when flies are most active, and just keep getting worse as summer progresses. The inflammation may fade in winter and you may think recovery is underway, but in spring the sore usually erupts again.

The first step in dealing with the problem is to have your horse's veterinarian examine the skin lesion and attempt to make a diagnosis, Dr. Pugh advises. Other conditions can have similar signs. Summer sores in the skin can look like proud flesh, various growths (sarcomas, squamous cell carcinoma, mast cell

tumors) or pythiosis ("swamp cancer" caused by a fungus-like organism). In the eye, a summer sore may mimic a growth, onchocerciasis (caused by the filarial worm *Onchocerca*), inflammation from a foreign object or certain bacterial or fungal infections. Some of these problems are potentially more dangerous to the horse than a summer sore, so the sooner you consult the veterinarian the better. The diagnosis is based on clinical signs and laboratory analysis of a scraping or biopsy.

To eliminate the sore, follow a three-part plan of attack:

■ **Treat it.** Your veterinarian may prescribe topical or systemic glucocorticoids, which are powerful anti-inflammatory drugs, or a topical mixture of glucocorticoids and dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO). Reducing inflammation should slow the proliferation of granulation tissue in the summer sore, but that alone may not be enough for healing to begin. Sometimes the excess tissue has to be surgically "de-bulked"—shaved or frozen off—for healing to take place. If a secondary infection has taken hold, the horse may also require antibiotics.

■ **Kill the parasites.** Treating the horse



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© FRANK SORGE/ARND.NL

Today, more horses are densely concentrated rather than spread out over many acres.

An Old Problem Returns

Experts aren't sure why summer sores are becoming less rare in some areas. Here are the leading theories:

Resistance. Constant reuse of the same dewormer allows parasites to develop resistance. Are *Habronema* and *Draschia* becoming resistant to ivermectin and other drugs of its class? "We don't know if this is happening," Dr. Pugh says. "No one has documented it."

New deworming programs. Resistance to commonly used dewormers has developed in other dangerous parasites. To counter that trend, in 2013 the American Association of Equine Practitioners issued guidelines

recommending a selective, individualized approach to deworming. The new approach targets the parasites that are the biggest threat to horse health (like small strongyles) and generally involves longer intervals between dewormings. Are *Habronema* and *Draschia* taking advantage of the longer intervals and staging a comeback? Although that's possible, Dr. Pugh says, "We began to see cases before the AAEP advocated the new protocols."

Weather. In recent years, warm weather has arrived earlier and hung around longer in many parts of the country. Warmer weather means a longer fly season, giving flies more opportunities to breed and produce offspring.

Management. Weather may be a factor, Dr. Pugh says, but the past 40 years have brought changes in how horses are kept. More horses are densely concentrated in urban and suburban stables, rather than spread out. In these situations, "Poor manure handling and lax fly control give fly populations a chance to increase. If you have more flies, you have more summer sores," he says.

Fans and fly-proof screens will help protect stabled horses during the times of day when flies are most active.

systemically with ivermectin or moxidectin should remove the adults from the stomach. Sometimes these drugs are applied directly to the sore as well, along with the anti-inflammatory treatments, to hit the larvae.

■ **Control flies.** Any open sore is a fly magnet, and flies will irritate the lesion and perhaps deposit more worm larvae. Fly-repellent ointment may discourage them, but farm-wide fly control is the best way to deal with these pests. "All fly-control programs should be built around reducing places where flies breed—manure, wet feed, wet organic material—and be part of a broad prevention strategy," Dr. Pugh says.

Prevention

Flies and parasites are herd problems—they pose risks for every horse on the property, not just the



Treating a horse systematically with ivermectin or moxidectin should remove adult worms from his stomach. Sometimes these drugs are applied directly to a summer sore as well to fight the stomach-worm larvae.



As part of an effective fly-control program, manure should be cleaned out of paddocks at least twice a week.

lone horse who develops a summer sore. To prevent these sores, you need to control both problems.

Go after flies where they live, breed and feed. Effective control can include these steps:

- **Clean up.** Pick stalls once or twice a day and clean paddocks at least twice a week to get rid of manure, spilled feed, trampled hay and other materials that attract and provide feeding and breeding sites for flies.

- **Manage manure.** How you do this will depend on your setup. You can compost it. Done right, composting generates

enough heat to kill fly larvae as well as parasite eggs and larvae. You can spread some on fields as fertilizer (but not on horse pastures—that would encourage parasite transmission). You can stockpile it in an area far from the barns and paddocks where horses are or you can have it hauled away. Except when it's spread on fields, keep it covered.

- **Try fly predators.** Added to manure piles, these tiny parasitic wasps lay their eggs in fly pupae. The wasp larvae feed on the pupae and destroy them. Suppliers usually ship the predators several times a season.

- **Use feed-through fly-control agents.** These products contain insect growth regulators or larvicides that pass through the horse undigested and end up in manure, where they keep fly larvae from developing. They'll also affect fly predators, so these approaches shouldn't be combined.

- **Protect horses.** Face and ear masks and topical repellents—sprays or, around wounds, ointments—can help. So can stabling horses during the times of day when flies are most active, especially if the stable has fans or fly-proof screens.

- **Kill flies with traps, baits and residual fly sprays** in areas where they congregate. Sprinkling sodium bisulfate on stall floors can also reduce fly numbers as well as

ammonia, in the barn.

Go after the parasites with a selective deworming program. When a horse gets a summer sore, it makes sense to treat his stablemates with ivermectin or moxidectin as a preventive measure. They've been visited by the same flies as the affected horse and may be harboring adult stomach worms. But when it comes to routine parasite control, the approach long followed by many horse owners—deworming every horse every eight weeks—should be off the table, Dr. Pugh says. Such indiscriminate dosing encourages resistance, which develops when a few worms survive treatment and pass the traits that helped them survive to their offspring. "This is critical in the case of other internal parasites, such as small strongyles [cyathostomes]," he says.

Already some dangerous equine parasites have found ways to resist common deworming medications, and the problem is spreading. Widespread resistance has developed against two of the three broad classes of these drugs, benzimidazoles (such as fenbendazole) and pyrantel salts (pyrantel pamoate or pyrantel tartrate). Ivermectin and moxidectin belong to the third class, the macrocyclic lactones. So far they're still effective against small strongyles, the most widespread and dangerous equine internal parasites. But researchers believe it's just a matter of time until worms resistant to all three classes of dewormers develop.

To delay that day and protect your horse, work with your veterinarian to set up a selective parasite-control program that's tailored to your situation. The recommended program will vary depending on where you live, how many horses are on the property, how old they are, how much pasture they have, how often they travel to shows, how often new horses come onto the property and other factors. Fecal egg counts will help identify horses who are high shedders of strongyle eggs. These horses may need deworming more often than others, while less susceptible horses may need to be checked and dewormed only a couple of times a year. 🐾

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