

# The Breath Connection

## CONNECTING WITH THE HORSE THROUGH BREATHING

**B**reathing, in addition to mindfulness and meditation, is a way to access your alignment and change patterns in your body and in your horse.

When we are resourced by our breath it allows for change to happen throughout the whole body. This is also an important first step when connecting with your horse and enhancing the well-being of both you and the horse.

The respiratory diaphragm spans the whole bottom of the rib cage as well as the intersection of the lumbar spine and the thoracic spine. This spot is incredibly important in the functional movement of the body of both horse and rider. It is where the support of the hind end (lower body in the rider) turns into power and allows for lift and extension in the front end (upper body).

### YOUR BREATH

Start by feeling your baseline breath and how it influences your body. Explore breathing in different scenarios to feel what it is like, for example, while

- ✦ Walking
- ✦ Sitting
- ✦ Standing
- ✦ Getting on your horse
- ✦ Riding your horse

Don't change your breath to match what you think it should feel like in this moment. Just observe what it feels like. What do you notice in your body? Where do you feel your breath?

### HORSE'S BREATH

Observe your horse's tendencies with its breath. What is it like when your horse breathes on its own, when walking, when you first start to ride?

Healthy movement in the body of the rider and the horse is expressed through contralateral movement. When you and your horse move there is a transfer of energy or power from your lower body to your upper body and the hind end to the front end of your horse. It is most easily seen in the spine and when the horse is walking or trotting, as this is when he has the most diagonal movement in his body. This movement and connection can be enhanced by mindful breathing.

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**Lauren Harmon**

You can also practice this technique while grooming your horse. Connect to your breathing and do some gentle

bodywork to help your horse open through its diaphragm and spine.

Here are some important points to be aware of when you start doing bodywork with your horses:

- ✦ Trust your intention/imagination because it assists in manifesting change.
- ✦ Connect to your breath (imagine your diaphragm lowering into your belly as you inhale).
- ✦ Make sure you find ease in your own body through your breath and posture before contacting your horse.
- ✦ Take a few gentle inhales, imagining that you are exhaling into the soles of your feet to ground yourself and feel your feet (especially your toes).
- ✦ Take a few deep inhales, imagining the breath going into your heart space and imagine your exhale leaving through your arms and out your fingertips.
- ✦ Contact the horse and let its body shape your hand versus trying to shape its body.
- ✦ Relax your armpits when you contact the horse, and this will relax your upper body and lower your center of gravity so that you can relax with your horse.
- ✦ Remember to breathe!

The time you spend in each location will depend on you and your horse. You will feel the horse soften and see signs of release like licking, chewing, eyes relaxing, deep breaths, yawning, to name a few.

### SPINE

Place your hands on the withers and sacrum and let yourself settle into your feet. Imagine the horse's spine lengthening and relaxing as you connect with your hands. You may also feel a wave of movement under your hands. This is the movement of the cranial sacral fluid in the spine as well as a sense of the connection through the body's whole fascial network.

### RIB CAGE

You will do this on both sides of the horse. Place your hands on the rib cage. Observe where your hands are drawn. You





This image demonstrates one option for placement of your hands to feel the craniosacral rhythm and fascia of the spine allowing for deeper connection between the horse's hind end and front end.



These images show you how to contact the ribcage and allow for expansion starting with your hands closer together and then "expanding" outwards. Photos by Lauren Harmon.

may end up moving to a few different places with your hands. Take deep breaths and imagine the ribs getting expansive.

### DIAPHRAGM/STERNUM

There are two different contact points that will help release the diaphragm and sternum. These contact points not only support the breath but also increase the horse's connection between its front end and hind end. To help release the diaphragm you will run one hand to the end of the sternum and the other

along the spine to right behind where your saddle would sit. This allows you to contact the front and back diaphragm indirectly. Take deep breaths and imagine your hands moving away from each other as if you are creating more space for the diaphragm. It helps to breathe into the space between your shoulders so that you feel broader in your breath. You may also feel a rocking movement under your hands.

Next, with one hand, contact the sternum from the front of the chest where then neck and chest meet, and let the



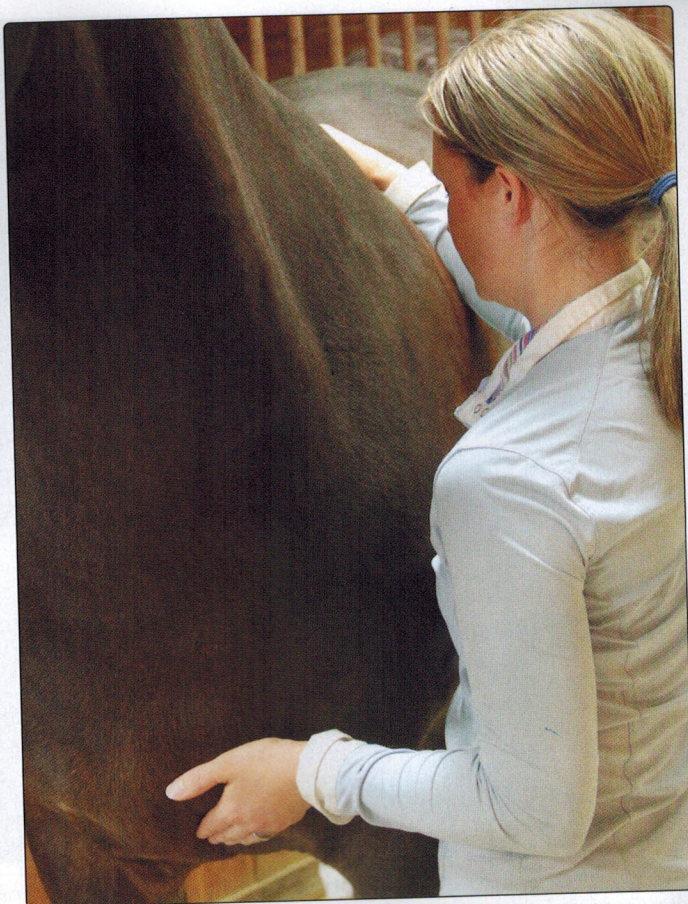


This image shows how to contact the diaphragm to help increase breath and keep yourself in a safe position.

other hand contact the withers. Take deep breaths and imagine your hands moving away from each other as if you are creating more space for the sternum and rib cage. You may also feel a rocking movement under your hands. This increases your horse's capacity for the thoracic sling to be able to elevate and expand.

When you are ready to ride, it will be important to embody the same concepts presented when prepping yourself for the bodywork. Here are a few more that apply to riding:

- ✦ Before getting on your horse, take a walk with your horse—connecting to your breath and exhaling through the soles of your feet. This will reinforce the support in your lower body and increase your coordination in the saddle. While walking, your toes should be the last part of your foot to leave the ground. It increases your connection all the way into your lower back.
- ✦ When you get up into the saddle, inhale as you lift yourself up over the saddle and exhale as you rest into the saddle.
- ✦ Give yourself lots of time to warm up, working with slow, deep inhales and exhales. You will find that your horse starts to connect to its breath and improves its



Here we contact the sternum to help it have more freedom of movement. Photos by Lauren Harmon.

movement. If it's a horse that tends to be higher in energy this will help the horse settle into its body.

- ✦ Most of all, remember to have fun and enjoy your time with your horse!

These are some basic principles for working with breathing to enhance your horse's and your own well-being and performance. To learn more about bodywork, embodiment, and movement to enhance your relationship with your horse and your well-being, visit [www.instillharmony.com](http://www.instillharmony.com). To become a body-worker consider training with Tracy Vroom; [www.tracyvroom.com](http://www.tracyvroom.com) or Joseph Freeman [www.equinenaturalmovement.com](http://www.equinenaturalmovement.com).

*Lauren Harmon is an integrative bodyworker and Certified Advanced Rolfer™ who strives to help enhance the horse and rider relationship through movement and embodiment. Due to events in her life, Lauren had to relearn how to ride from scratch and this gave her new insight on how to help horse and rider embody their brilliance together. She does bodywork and movement with the horse and rider together and then helps them in the motion in sessions she calls embodied equestrian! Thank you to Greta Vowell of Dressage Pacifico and her horse Guinevere, CPF, for being fabulous models and participants!*