

## **Warming down correctly**

Cooling down would make more sense being called warming down. It is vital to keep your horse moving at a slower pace and looser frame after any exercise session.

### **Effleurage:**

Effleurage is the name given to a stroking of the body, either by one or two hands. Start the away from the central body (distal aspect) move towards the main body following the direction of the main veins centripetally, (towards the heart and groin). Effleurage enhances blood and lymphatic flow and relaxes the subject.

When you have finished your competition effleurage, effleurage and then more effleurage

### **Method:**

Soften the hands and wrists so that they follow the form of the body below. Think of working with your eyes closed and then describe the surface you are working on will allow you to feel the surface of the body better. The hands work in a slow rhythm which will calm the horse and reassure the subject. Hand pressure should be enough to flatten a sponge or plastic wrap on a table top.

Work over all the muscle in a sequence from poll through the neck to the hocks.

The major benefits are:

- Increased circulation, removes lactic acid build up and toxins.
- Reduces cramping, and muscle soreness
- Decreases recovery time after strenuous exercise
- Decreases injury recovery time
- Assists in muscle injury prevention
- Simulates neurological activity
- Supports muscle tonification
- Frees joint stiffness, enhances suppleness and flexibility
- Promotes relaxation in horses
- Improves mental disposition
- Increases oxygenation to muscles
- Increases hydration of muscle tissue
- Releases contracted muscle fibres
- Increases lymphatic flow, reduces fluid build up, increased proteins to blood transference
- Promotes better relationship between horse and human

Gentle stretching to the fore and hind limbs will assist with muscle recovery.

### **Warm weather**

26 degrees or higher will increase the risk of heat stress related to excessive work. It is worth mentioning that any horse can suffer from heat stress this includes, dressage, jumpers, and ponies at gymkhanas as well as eventers.

Cold water applied over the skin and scraped off will reduce heat from the body by two methods convection and evaporation. Sweating also reduces heat from the body; this method will assist as the horse is competing. Cold water treatment is very effective in rapid reduction of heat from the body. Keep your horse moving slowly and do not give cold water until the horse has recovered; it is worth remembering not to leave excess water or damp towels on the horse as they soon create an insulation effect and have the reverse effect of keeping heat in the body. 10 – 15 minutes of walking is considered a good rule of thumb during the warm down phase.

Rapid cooling can create stiffness and soreness to muscles. I have outlined some techniques which will assist post cold therapy treatment and on a massage level. Muscles have been tussled and stretched; possibly over worked during the competition will respond well to effleurages and some long and slow stretches. (And that's not just the horse the rider may benefit as well!).

### **Calculate the weather vs. heat stress risk**

Whilst surfing the web I came across this interesting piece of information. We often may worry about the heat and humidity but maybe this calculation will assist you to make the correct decision when it comes to riding in the heat.

Eg 100F = 37.7C    95F=35C    85F = 29.4C    80F = 26.6C    75F=23.8C    70F=21.1C

*There are various formulas that people use to calculate whether the combined heat and humidity make it suitable - or not - for riding. One such formula - the easiest, but not necessarily the most accurate - is to take the outside temperature in Fahrenheit, and add the relative humidity. If your total is below 120, you should be able to do whatever you like without risking heat stress to the horse. The horse may not even sweat much, or at all, in those conditions. If the total is between 130 and 150, the horse will be sweating, and you will need to pay attention to its water intake, but the horse should be able to maintain a reasonable core temperature. If the total is between 150 and 180, then heat stress is more likely, but much will depend on the relative values of temperature and humidity! This is where your own judgement must take precedence over any quick formula. For example, if the temperature is 105 and the humidity is 60%, your total would be 165, but it would be safer to ride under those conditions than if the total were the result of temperature of 90 and a humidity of 75%. If the total is over 180, then it's a good idea not to ride at all.*

*The above "formula" is a general guideline, NOT an absolute truth, and extremely wet or dry conditions will make it less helpful. If you like the mathematical approach to the "too hot and humid" idea, there are better, more accurate, and much more complicated ways to calculate the heat index - here is a URL for a very useful page from the Weather Channel website: [http://www.weather.com/encyclopedia/charts/heat\\_index.html](http://www.weather.com/encyclopedia/charts/heat_index.html)*

Ref: [www.horsesense.org](http://www.horsesense.org)



Smooth strokes starting from the Neck and continue systematically to the tail.



Stretch the neck to relax the poll and neck muscles



Gentle stretch of the ascending Pectorals, bend foreleg and then bring back gently



foreleg and triceps stretch you make like to also do the hamstring stretches (see last issue for picture)

Gentle stretches and smooth effleurage will aid recovery post competition.