



Classical Horse Training

Combining art with science to achieve balance and harmony



WEIGHT LOSS SCHEDULES

“a specific program for horses that are overweight and/or need a boost in general fitness”

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this program specifically designed for horses that are overweight¹ and/or need a boost in their general fitness.

Why a specific program on weight loss / maintenance you might ask? Well, over the years I have come across too many obese horses – including my own. Just as in humans, overweight in horses is not desirable and can lead to many health complications including:

- Metabolic syndromes
- Cardiovascular diseases
- Impaired joint function
- Weakened topline
- General discomfort²
- Poor performance
- Overheating



It goes without explanation that an obese horse usually is an unfit horse. Furthermore, excessive fat can lead to metabolic diseases such as *Insulin Resistance*. Also, joints will be strained more as they need to carry extra weight. More specifically, overweight can prohibit proper function. For example, the stifle needs to be able to clear the belly. When a belly is too heavy, the stifle might not be able to function properly and the horse might alter its normal flight arc.

Finally, most obese horses tend sink in their back (swayback) which weakens the topline

¹ Horses that are underweight also need adapted feeding and training schedules. If your horse is underweight, please reach out to me to set out an individual plan.

² Especially for horses suffering from chronic conditions such as osteoarthritis as extra weight burdens the joints even more.

and makes the horse more prone to injury – especially when rider’s weight is added.

As such, this program is designed to offer the following benefits:

- Alleviating discomfort
- Reaching ideal weight
- Increasing stamina
- Improving posture



So what will you need to set up for success?

- Knowledge of basic nutrition
- Knowledge of basic physiology
- Knowledge of basic biomechanics
- **STRONG** motivation to do the work



That might seem like a lot, but I can assure you that if you invest time to learn, it will be quite easy to make it your own. Knowledge about nutrition, physiology and biomechanics is covered in the respectable manuals to make sure you have read those prior to starting this program.

Furthermore, it is absolutely necessary that you stay motivated throughout the progress. To success, you simply need to do the work. The work doesn’t have to be complicated, but it does require time investment. As such, you need to be prepared to do the effort it takes to get results. But if you do, I can guarantee that every horse will benefit to a certain level.

Finally, the level of success is also dependent on the individual horse. Research suggests there is great difference in the fat metabolism within breeds and individual. Factors that play a role are for example muscle fiber composition and insulin sensitivity. Hence, results

of this program might vary between horses. Some horses will require more work than others, but even a small change can make a big difference.

In the coming chapters I will provide a step-by-step process and various training schedules to optimize your training and help your horse to become (more) fit! Let's do it!

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

- **Step 1:** Measure and/or weigh your horse to determine starting point.
- **Step 2:** Observe and palpate your horse for determining Body Condition Score.
- **Step 3:** Log your feeding schedule. Note both nutrients and portions.
- **Step 4:** Measure your horse's heart rate at rest, during and after exercise.
- **Step 5:** Determine your horse's general mobility by performing carrot stretches and mobilisation techniques of the limbs as demonstrated in the videos.
- **Step 6)** Choose an appropriate training sequence as set out in this document
- **Step 7)** Get going and measure in between results for every 3 weeks. Don't forget to take photos. It will help you to put progress in perspective.
- **Step 8)** Video your session(s) and submit as an online lesson for feedback
- **Step 9)** Enjoy the process and share your results with fellow students!

STEP 1 – MEASURE TO KNOW

Horse Measure Tapes are widely available in equestrian shops and online. Follow the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the tape.



Horse weighting scale services are often offered by companies that provides services to make worming the horse easier.

STEP 2 - BODY CONDITION SCORE

The Henneke Equine Body Condition Scoring system was developed in the early 1980s by Don Henneke at Texas A&M University with the goal of creating a universal scale to assess horses' bodyweight. It is a standardized system that can be used across all breeds without specialized equipment. General body condition can be measured through a scoring system from 1-9 that relies on visual inspection and palpation of six conformation points, including:

- Neck
- Withers
- Shoulder
- Back
- Ribs
- Croup / tailhead



The main criterion is the amount of flesh or fat covering these areas of the body. A score of 1 is applied to horses which are emaciated (extremely thin), while a score of 9 is indicative of a very fat horse (obese). A body score between 4-6 would be ideal, depending on breed. See page below for a full oversight.

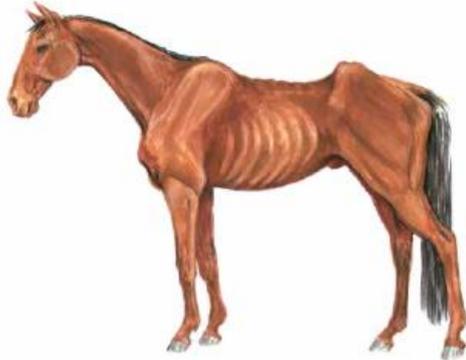
****Special note****

Note if there are any underlying health concerns such as unsoundness, ulcers, infection, joint issues and/or pain, attend to these concerns FIRST prior to starting the program. A mechanical lameness [caused by improper posture or incorrect movement patterns] or joint issues that require movement [such as arthritis] can be an acceptable starting point under certain conditions, however pain and active infection never is.

Like this poster? Then go to: <https://shop.thehorse.com/collections/educational-materials/products/horse-body-condition-score-poster> to purchase the poster in high quality to hang up in your barn or stable!

Equine Body Condition Score

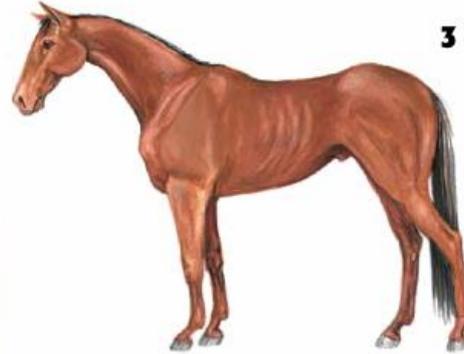
the **HORSE**
YOUR GUIDE TO EQUINE HEALTH CARE



1



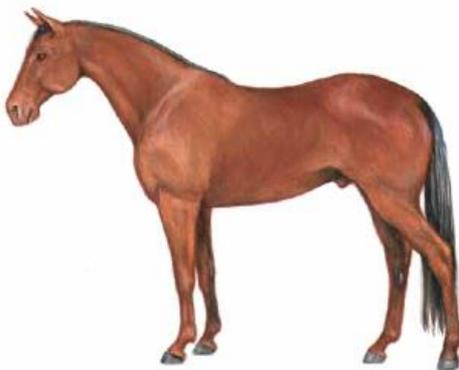
SCORE	DESCRIPTION
1	POOR Horse is extremely emaciated. The backbone, ribs, hipbones, and tailhead project prominently. Bone structure of the withers, shoulders, and neck easily noticeable. No fatty tissues can be felt.
2	VERY THIN Horse is emaciated. Slight fat covering over vertebrae. Backbone, ribs, tailhead, and hipbones are prominent. Withers, shoulders, and neck structures are discernible.



3

3	THIN Fat built up about halfway on vertebrae. Slight fat layer can be felt over ribs, but ribs easily discernible. The tailhead is evident, but individual vertebrae cannot be seen. The hipbones cannot be seen, but withers, shoulder, and neck are emphasized.
4	MODERATELY THIN Negative crease along back. Faint outline of ribs can be seen. Fat can be felt along tailhead. Hip bones cannot be seen. Withers, neck, and shoulders not obviously thin.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBIN PETERSON, DVM; BASED ON TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY BODY CONDITION SCORE



5



5	MODERATE Back is level. Ribs can be felt, but not easily seen. Fat around tailhead beginning to feel spongy. Withers are rounded and shoulders and neck blend smoothly into the body.
6	MODERATELY FLESHY May have a slight crease down the back. Fat on the tailhead feels soft. Fat over the ribs feels spongy. Fat beginning to be deposited along the sides of the withers, behind the shoulders, and along the neck.
7	FLESHY A crease is seen down the back. Individual ribs can be felt, but noticeable filling between ribs with fat. Fat around tailhead is soft. Noticeable fat deposited along the withers, behind the shoulders, and along the neck.



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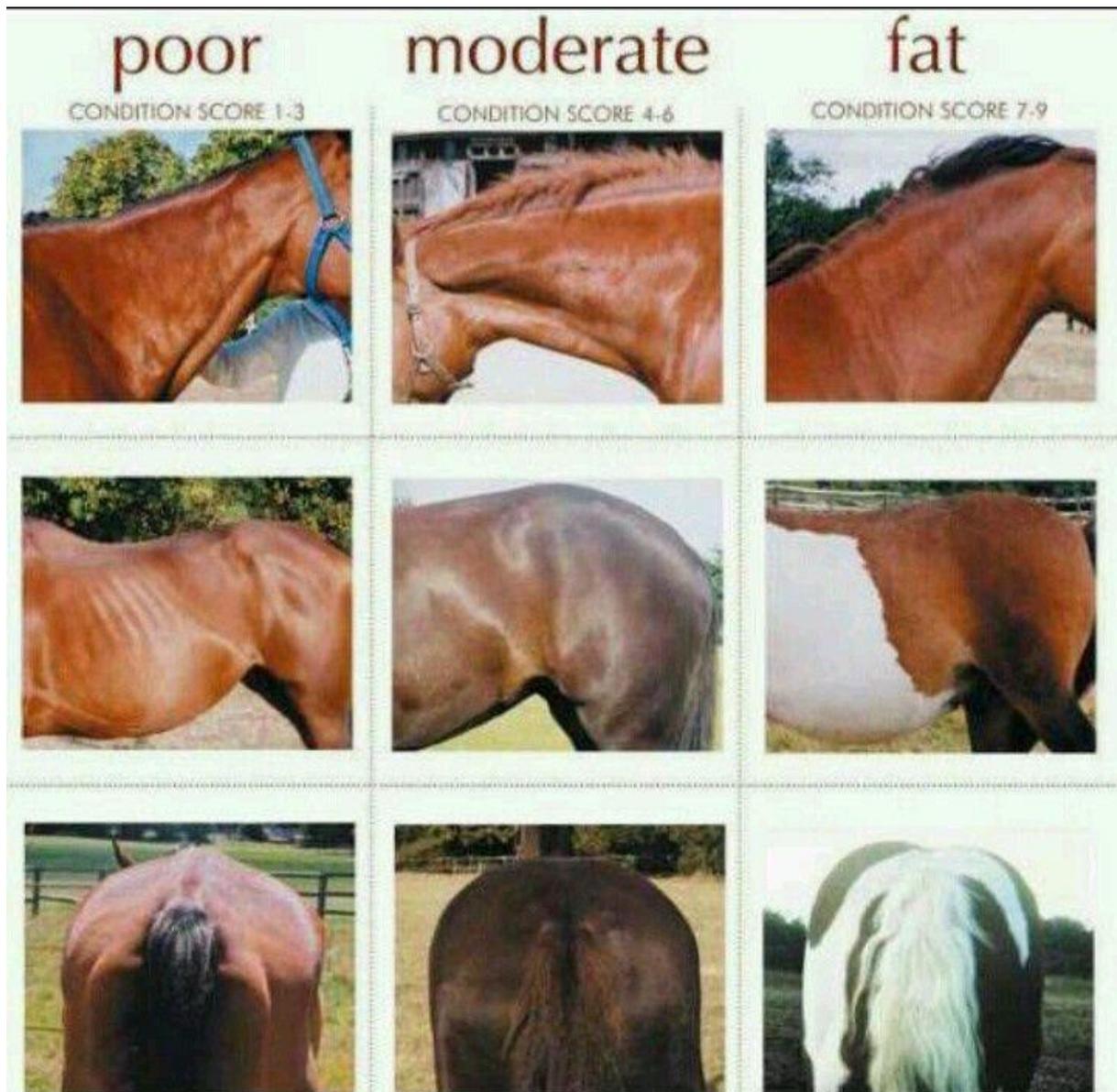


7

8	FAT Crease down back is prominent. Ribs difficult to feel due to fat in between. Fat around tailhead very soft. Area along withers filled with fat. Area behind shoulders filled in flush with the barrel of the body. Noticeable thickening of neck. Fat deposited along the inner buttocks.
9	EXTREMELY FAT Obvious crease down back. Fat is in patches over rib area, with bulging fat over tailhead, withers, neck, and behind shoulders. Fat along inner buttocks may rub together. Flank is filled in flush with the barrel of the body.

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Stabilized Rice Bran Horse Supplement



STEP 3 – LOG YOUR HORSE’S FEEDING SCHEDULE

Naturally, diet is a very important factor if you want to control your horse’s weight. As such, you need to measure both nutrients as well as portions.

First, start with logging the amount of forage / hay your horse consumes, followed by additional feeds and supplements. Check for added sugars and the balance between carbohydrates and fats your horse is ingesting on a daily basis.

You can fill in your feeding schedule in the progress report. Make sure to log the nutrients rather than the products if you need feedback from me.

Apart from feeding schedule, also start measuring the food rewards you might use during training. You don't to give a whole hand of pony nuts to make your horse feel proud;)



STEP 4 – MEASURE HEART RATE

Measuring your horse's heart rate will provide a very useful indication of your horse's overall level of fitness. You can either use a stethoscope behind the left elbow, a heart rate measure device or measure manual for digital pulse. Measure the following moments:

- Resting heart rate – under average temperatures
- Directly after 20-25 low-moderate intensity exercise
- Measure recovery rate after 10 min after exercise

A normal resting heart rate lies between 28-40 beats per minute. Upon heart rates between 70-140 bpm the horse is activating aerobic metabolism of fat. Upon heart rate between 140-180 the horse uses both aerobic and anaerobic metabolism of carbohydrates and fat. The

anaerobic threshold usually lies somewhere between 180-200bpm where the horse is mainly burning carbohydrates and producing lactic acid.

STEP 5 – TEST GENERAL MOBILITY

Perform basic carrot and limb stretches to determine the level of flexibility of your horse: is your horse intrinsically stiff or is it contracting?

A horse that appears very mobile will need more exercise and strength training. A horse that appears stiff will need more inclusion of flexibility exercises.



STEP 6 – CHOOSE A TRAINING SEQUENCE

Choose an appropriate training sequence as set out in this document. Your initial measurements will determine which training sequence is best to start off with.

Always keep in mind that these training sequences are examples. There are countless variations possible so feel free to make it your own and vary – as long as you stay mostly within aerobic metabolism the possibilities are endless.

STEP 7 – GET GOING AND MEASURE EVERY 3 WEEKS

At the end of this document you'll find a very detailed progress report that you can print and fill in. It will help you to stay on track and to experience the progress very consciously.

Within 3-5 weeks every horse should start to show early signs of progress, however the speed of progress might vary within individuals. It is completely normal that after the few results that progress might seem to stagnate for a while. This is because the adaptive response usually starts to kick in. As such, it is generally estimated that it will take somewhere between 6-12 months to really achieve the best possible results.

So, you need to be in there for the long run. Remember, slow and steady wins the race.

STEP 8 – SUBMIT ONLINE LESSONS FOR FEEDBACK

As mentioned earlier, the process of weight loss, weight maintenance and general fitness is highly individual. As such, it is highly recommend to submit online lesson of your work so that I can help and motivate you if necessary.

TRAINING SCHEDULES

The horse shows some unique physiologic adaptations to exercise which makes it difficult to apply findings from human physiology directly to the horse. Today, most trainers continue to use training methods that have been handed down from generation to generation without ever undergoing scientific validations. Worse, many trainers are reluctant to innovate. As such, effective training schedules for weight loss and overall fitness are rare.

To help you to innovate and think beyond the box, I have listed a couple of training schedules that have proven to be very effective for weight loss and/or general fitness. It is important though to understand you need to approach these schedules as suggestions only. Always keep in mind that the horse needs to be free of tension and that it needs to be able to do the task that is being asked. As such, do not follow these schedules literally for the sake of just doing this, but do it in the pace that your horse feels comfortable with.

All schedules will have a mix of aerobic and anaerobic work to get most result. Whereas anaerobic work is usually quite dynamic, aerobic works is mostly about stability and continuity. As such, these schedules are not revolutionary by any means, but simply functional and they can help you to stay motivated and have *'stick behind the door'* as we would say in Dutch.

So yes sometimes the work requires is simple, but by no means boring. Make it challenging for yourself. Consider this time as quality time for you and your horse. Take a few deep breaths and appreciate your surroundings and the two of you being together.

TERMINOLOGY EXPLANATIONS

An exercise session simply focuses on movement and cardio. To get the heart rate up and the metabolic system going, it is important to not interrupt or end these sessions too quickly. The set times are preferably in one go. That being said, never pull through resistances. So if you and your horse need a bit of a rest – try to minimize the breaks to 15-45s. each time in which you focus on deep breathing.

Within the exercise session, you only keep basic vertical / horizontal balance in mind in the sense that the horse's movement is not hindered by huge imbalances, but you won't correct beyond that. So if the horse loses balance within the movement session, of course you can step in where needed but keep in mind that the main focus should be on simply moving so only try to apply correction when the loss of balance is of such impact that it limits the ability to normal movement. Apart from that, just let the horse be. You'll get your chances to work on balance in the training sessions.

An easy way to avoid 'micro managing' is to do the movement sessions outdoor like a hack.

A training session focusses on an interval training to combine multiple elements – such as balance, flexibility and strength - for optimal performance. Of all the exercises mentioned, you always need to consider vertical and horizontal balance. As such, you always need to check for correct spinal alignment and engagement of the thoracic sling.

Remember, shape always comes first so don't just do the sequences for the sake of following them strictly. Instead, always keep observing your horse. So when tension arises, don't just continue because you feel you have to 'follow the schedule'. That is pointless. So then just take more breaks and alleviate tensions and focus on shape. The training schedules are ONLY there to give you some ideas of exercises that you can do, but they are by no means vast guidelines.

A resting day consists of no active training so your horse can recuperate. However, since horses are movers in essence this doesn't mean you can't do anything at all, but you simply take your mind off goal oriented training. You can still go for a nice walk, do some passive exercises such as bodywork, taping or have some fun together. It is advised to have at least 1-2 days where you do not engage with your horse in any activities so it can just be a horse – unless the horse is stabled and doesn't have access to free movement.

Below, I have created three training schedules based upon your horse's overall condition. Each schedule consists of interval training sessions combining multiple elements such as a cardio, strength and flexibility.

The basic training sequence is suitable for horses with a body condition score between 7-9 and limited mobility and stamina. It is for those horse that might not have been trained for a while or have just recovered from an injury. It is also suitable for those horse that have not yet learned the full range of lateral exercises [yet].

The medium training sequence is suitable for horse with a body condition score between 6-8 and limited to average mobility and stamina. It is for those that have been trained in the past to a moderate level, but under circumstances have gained weight or not been trained for a while. It is also suitable as an upgrade for those horses that have successfully progressed through the basic program.

The advanced training sequence is suitable for horses with a body condition score between 5-7 and average to good mobility and stamina. It might help in losing just the few extra pounds, but it could also be implemented as a means to solidify the perfect body condition. As such, the intention is not to lose any additional weight, but to simply keep the horse fit as it is and solidify its strength. It is suitable for those horses that have either progressed through the basic and medium training schedules or those that have been trained up till and advanced level.

As training schedules will be suitable for horses that are insulin resistant. Always take into account that training is just a small part of the bigger picture. Keep checking your management or possible underlying issues if you are not booking results.

Happy training!

Basic

	Type of training	Frequency	Sequence
Week 1-3	Exercise session	2-3 times a week	20-30 minutes of medium walk on straight lines, squares and/or big circles.
	Training session	1-2 times a week	10 minutes of medium walk 5 minutes figure of 8 5 minutes serpentine 1 minute quick break 6 times shoulder-in 2 times shoulder-in to circle 1 minute quick break 5 minutes of medium walk 5 minutes of working trot 1 minute quick break 4 times haunches-in 2 minutes medium walk FINISH
Week 3-6	Exercise session	1-2 times a week	25-40 minutes of medium walk and working trot on straight lines, squares and/or big circles.
	Training session	2-3 times a week	10 minutes of medium walk 5 minutes of working trot 8 times shoulder-in in walk 1 minute quick break 6 times transition walk-halt-walk 4 times haunches-in

			5 minutes of working trot 1 minute quick break 4 times counter-shoulder in 2 times figure of.8 trot 2 minutes of medium walk FINISH
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- You can start and finish each exercise session / training with stretches when needed.
- When there is no specific gait mentioned, you can choose what the horse can take to say under the anaerobic threshold. However, if the horse is unsound in the trot, stay in walk.
- You can choose to do this either in groundwork, work in hand, lungeing, long reigning or liberty. You can include poles if the horse is able to do these properly.
- For squares vs circles: check the rotation of the horse to determine whether you do mostly squares or more circle work.
- If only gait is mentioned, you can again choose whether circles, straight lines or squarer are preferred.
- For the lateral exercises: choose which side your horse benefits most. So when I say 8 shoulder-in, it is up to you to decide you do each side evenly or that you do a bit more to one side than the other to straighten the horse.
- If your horse needs more breaks in between, you can give those of course.
- Preferably allow the horse to have a roll afterwards each session, best way to relax muscles, lower heart rate and activate the parasympathetic nervous system
- Feel free to vary between schedules or experiment with different exercises. The schedules and sequences presented are just a few of many possible. If in doubt, send in an online lesson.

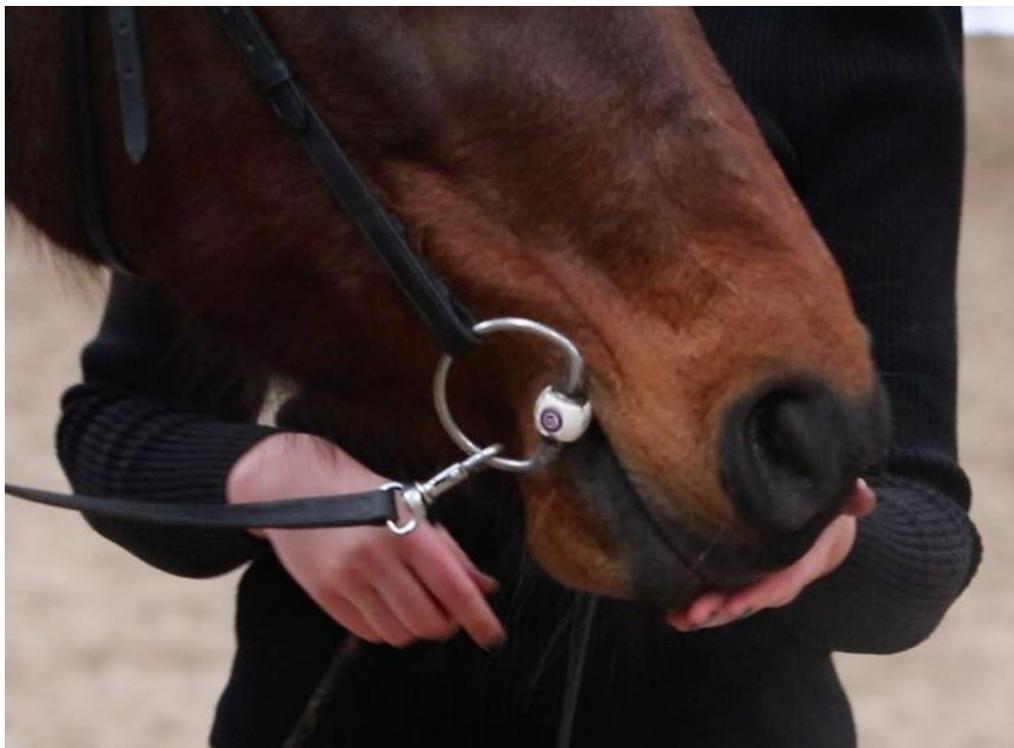
Medium

	Type of training	Frequency	Sequence
Week 1-3	Exercise session	1-2 times a week	25- 45 minutes of medium walk and trot on straight lines, squares and/or circles.
	Training session	2-3 times a week	<p>5-10 minutes of medium walk 2- 6 times shoulder-in 1 – 3 times half pass</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>5-10 minutes of medium trot 2-4 Lateral sequences in walk: SI → renvers counter SI → travers SI → travers</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>5 minutes of medium walk / trot 2-4 transitions: walk – halt /back up – walk walk – trot – walk</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>2-6 times poles / small jump 1-2 figures of 8 in walk</p> <p>FINISH</p>

Week 3-6	Exercise session	1-2 times a week	30 - 50 minutes of medium walk and working trot on straight lines, squares and/or big circles.
	Training session	2-3 times a week	<p>5- 10 minutes of medium walk 5 – 10 minutes of medium trot</p> <p>Lateral sequence: SI → travers half circle → half pass</p> <p>SI → half pass → half pirouette → half pass → renvers → straight</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>2-4 times SI in trot 4-8 transitions: Walk – halt / back-up / walk Trot – walk / halt / trot</p> <p>2-4 circles trot or slow canter</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>2-4 Lateral sequence in walk: SI → circle SI → travers on the circle Square → each corner travers Travers on circle → straight on circle SI → half pass → SI → straight</p> <p>2 minutes medium trot straight lines 2 minutes medium walk</p> <p>FINISH</p>

- You can start and finish each exercise session / training with stretches when needed.
- When there is no specific gait mentioned, you can choose what the horse can take to stay under the anaerobic threshold. However, if the horse is unsound in the trot, stay in walk.

- You can choose to do this either in groundwork, work in hand, lungeing, long reigning or liberty.
- If only gait is mentioned, you can again choose whether circles, straight lines or squarer are preferred. On the opposite, if no gait is mentioned you can choose to whatever feels right.
- For the lateral exercises: choose which side you horse benefits most. So when I say 8 times shoulder-in, it is up to you to decide you do each side evenly or that you do a bit more to one side than the other to straighten the horse.
- If your horse needs more breaks in between, you can give those of course.
- Preferably allow the horse to have a roll afterwards each session, best way to relax muscles, lower heart rate and activate the parasympathetic nervous system
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ADVANCED TRAINING SEQUENCE ON NEXT PAGE

Advanced

	Type of training	Frequency	Sequence
Week 1-3	Exercise session	1-2 times a week	<p>20-50 minutes of medium walk, trot and (slow canter) on straight lines, squares and/or circles.</p> <p>Within those minutes: 2-10 transitions from either gait.</p>
	Training session	2-3 times a week	<p>5-10 minutes of medium walk 5-10 transitions SI / HI on the circle 4 circles in trot or canter 4 times half pass either walk or trot</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>2-6 times lateral sequence: SI → renvers → counter SI → travers</p> <p>Counter SI on the circle → travers on the circle</p> <p>Travers → renvers → travers diagonal</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>5 minutes of medium trot straight lines 2-8 times lateral sequence: pirouette → renvers pirouette</p> <p>Serpentine in travers / renvers</p> <p>Half pass → pirouette → half pass</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>4-6 transitions: Walk – halt / back-up – walk</p>

			<p>Trot – halt trot Walk – canter – walk /trot</p> <p>5-10 minutes walk – collected walk – walk (half steps if the horse can do it)</p> <p>2 minutes collected canter</p> <p>FINISH</p>
Week 3-6	Exercise session	1-2 times a week	<p>20-60 minutes of medium walk, trot and canter on straight lines, squares and/or big circles.</p> <p>Within those minutes: 2-10 transitions either gait. Add in poles and /or small jump.</p>
	Training session	2-3 times a week	<p>5- 10 minutes of medium / collected walk 2 - 4 times zig zag half pass 2 – 8 times SI → renvers → travers on circle</p> <p>1-4 minutes canter / counter canter</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>2-10 transitions collected / extended (could be with back-up in between)</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>5 minutes pole work on circle 2-6 times SI in trot or canter straight line</p> <p>1 minute quick break</p> <p>2-6 minutes walk / half steps or collected walk to collected trot transitions</p> <p>2-4 lateral transitions:</p> <p>SI → renvers → counter SI → travers on circle or straight line</p>

			<p>SI → travers on circle</p> <p>Pirouette → renvers pirouette</p> <p>2-4 minutes trot / canter straight line 1-4 times walk / collected walk / walk</p> <p>FINISH</p>
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- You can start and finish each exercise session / training with stretches when needed.
- When there is no specific gait mentioned, you can choose. Make sure to balance aerobic and anaerobic work properly: aerobic for fat burning, anaerobic (high intervals) for lean muscle mass).
- You can choose to do this either in groundwork, work in hand, lungeing, long reigning or liberty.
- If only gait is mentioned, you can again choose whether circles, straight lines or squarer are preferred. On the opposite, if no gait is mentioned you can choose to whatever feels right.
- For the lateral exercises: choose which side you horse benefits most. So when I say 8 times shoulder-in, it is up to you to decide you do each side evenly or that you do a bit more to one side than the other to straighten the horse.
- If your horse needs more breaks in between, you can give those of course.
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GOOD LUCK !!