

Fighting fit

There are a myriad of exercise videos currently circulating, but riders require a certain type of fitness and flexibility. In the first part of this new series, chartered physio *Sarah Claridge* suggests three rider-focused exercises

IN the early days of lockdown, many of us eagerly bunny-hopped around to Joe Wicks' schoolkids' morning workouts (parents possibly more than their children). But as the restrictions continue, and with no competitions on the horizon, it's hard to stay motivated, especially for those who cannot even get out to ride. However, keeping fit is not only good for our mental and physical health, it will enable us to hit the ground running as soon as the competition gates do open again.

Every week in *Horse & Hound* until mid-June, we'll feature three rider-focused exercises, in stretch, cardio and strength/endurance, to boost your fitness regime. There are various grades within the exercises, so start gradually and work up to a level at which you are comfortable.

**NEW
FITNESS
SERIES**

Strength and endurance

CRISS CROSS LEVEL 1 ▶

10 reps, 3 sets

Lie on your back, with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Find your neutral pelvis by arching and flattening the small of your back; rest in the middle point.

Interlace your hands behind your head. Engage your pelvic floor and core muscles gently on a breath out and maintain throughout the exercise. Exhaling, lift your head and chest off the mat.

As you exhale, rotate your trunk to the side with your elbow reaching to the opposite knee. As you inhale, move back to the centre.

Switch sides, rotating through the centre and pulling your abdominals inwards all the time. Keep your pelvis stable throughout.

Keep your elbows wide open and rotate your upper body as one unit. Ensure your stomach does not peak in the centre line, it should remain engaged and flat throughout.

ABOUT SARAH

Chartered physiotherapist Sarah Claridge runs Meadow Physio & Pilates, specialising in rider strength and fitness.

Visit meadowphysioandpilates.com for online classes and one-to-one sessions to help improve your body's optimal performance.



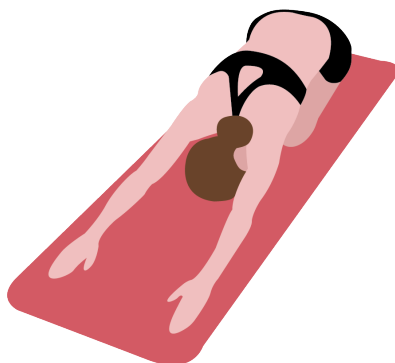
● Follow on Instagram and Facebook @ Meadowphysioandpilates

Stretching

CHILD POSE ▶

30 secs, 4 reps

Get on to your hands and knees, and drop your buttocks to your heels. Stretch your hands forwards, dropping your head between your shoulders to the floor. You should feel the stretch through your back and upper arms.



CHILD POSE WITH A TWIST ▲

30 secs, 4 reps

Kneel on the floor and sit on your heels. You can place cushions directly underneath your hips if you need to. Stretch your arms out in front of you, and walk your hands over to one side. Keeping your hips over your heels, turn your outer palm to face up, and place the other hand on top. Arch your outer side up as

you reach to the side to increase the stretch. **SARAH SAYS:** "A lovely stretch to encourage length through your back. Try to breathe out as you stretch down, relaxing into the length of your back to improve suppleness to help you move with your horse's stride"

"You can try to hold it for longer than 30 to 40 seconds, which is often nice at the end of the day."

Cardio

LATERAL BUNNY JUMPS ▶

30 secs, 1 rep, 3 sets

Stand up straight with a line on the floor to your side.

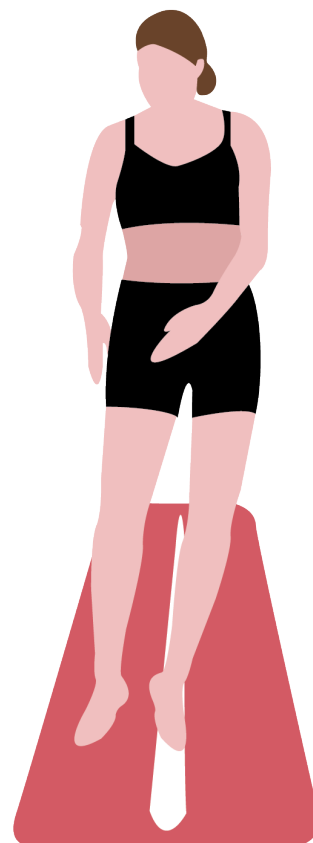
Jump sideways over the line, landing lightly on your feet as you regain your balance. Try to land as quietly as you can, absorbing the impact with your hips and knees as if landing from a showjump. You may use your arms to swing to help with this explosive movement.

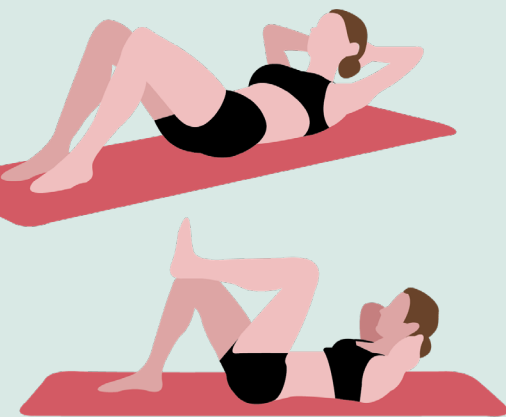
Next, jump back over the line and regain your balance.

To make this lower impact, step from side to side rather than jump, still lifting and lowering your arms with each step.

To make this harder, do not rest between jumps; keep the jumps a continuous flow of movement.

SARAH SAYS: "This is a great exercise to help build cardiovascular fitness, key for event riders in the cross-country phase and showjumpers over the more challenging courses, or if you are riding multiple horses per day."





CRISS CROSS LEVEL 3 ▶

10 reps, 3 sets

Lie on your back, find your neutral pelvis and engage your pelvic floor and core muscles gently. Come into “double table top” position with your legs one at a time and with your shins parallel to the floor.

Interlace your hands behind your head. Exhaling, lift your head and chest.

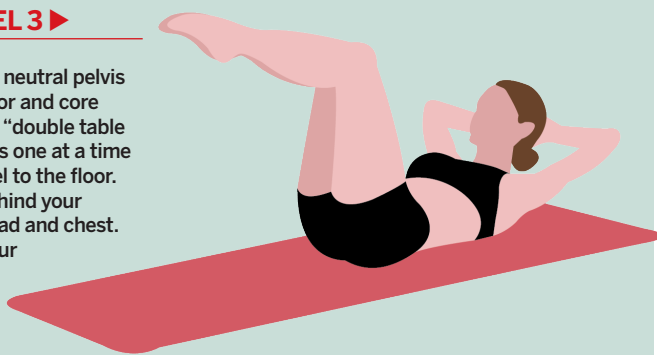
As you exhale, rotate your trunk to the side with your elbow reaching to the opposite bent knee and straighten out your other leg.

As you inhale, move back to the centre, changing your legs.

Alternate sides, rotating through the centre and pulling your abdominals inwards. Continue switching legs and ensure your feet remain at the same level throughout.

Keep your elbows wide open and rotate your upper body as one unit. Ensure your stomach does not peak in the centre line, it should remain engaged and flat throughout.

Maintain your breathing and do not hold your breath during the exercise.



CRISS CROSS LEVEL 2 ▲

10 reps, 3 sets

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Find your neutral pelvis and engage your pelvic floor and core gently on a breath out and maintain throughout the exercise.

Place your hands lightly behind your head and curl your upper body up into a crunch position.

Holding the crunch, lift one knee in towards you, then lower it back down before lifting the other knee

SARAH SAYS: “This exercise engages and tones the abdominal muscles, which form part of the anterior oblique sling. These are key riding muscles as they work in conjunction with our inside thigh muscles. We need to be strong on both sides to be able to work on our rider straightness. This is key for helping stabilise us for our leg aids.”

“Start with three sets of 10 reps, building up to three sets of 30 seconds, with 30-second rest break between sets. Increase to three sets of 40 seconds with a 20-second rest break between sets.”

TAKE CARE: With any new form of exercise, your body needs to build up gradually to avoid strain. Please seek the advice of a chartered physiotherapist or your GP if you are unsure about whether you should do any exercises due to underlying health conditions.

Particular caution should be taken if you

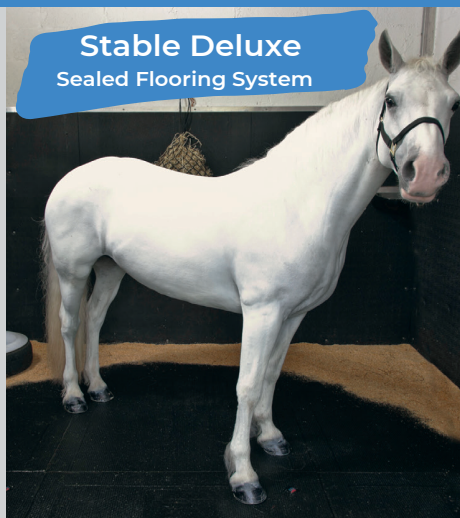
have any cartilage (meniscal tears) injuries in your knees or joint replacements in your hips or knees.

Avoid the cardiovascular exercises if you have any unstable cardiac health problems, acute disc bulges/prolapses or referred leg pain, pins and needles, numbness, rheumatoid arthritis or

osteoporosis – or if you are undergoing cancer treatment, pregnant or have any gynaecological conditions. **H&H**

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