

I'm an animal BODYWORKER! I know what straight is...

A couple of weeks ago I had a (long overdue) session with my bodyworker. She specializes in myoskeletal (re)alignment, “more” than massage, not quite chiro (though I do have a chiropractor I visit fairly regularly). While on her table, face up, she told me to align my body where I felt I was most balanced and “straight.” Easy peasy I thought.. So I made some adjustments, gave her a nod. She asked, “This is where you feel straight and balanced?” I gave a very firm “yes, “thinking in my head that I TOTALLY aced it! She looked at me, pursed her lips very briefly, and said, “Ohhhhkayyyy..” She then placed one hand on the side of my left ribcage, and other hand on my right hip and literally moved my ribs over a few inches. “THIS is where you’re straight,” she said. “What?!?! No way! How can that be?? I’m an animal body worker for crying out loud! I KNOW what straight and balanced is!” I thought. She then had me line my fingers at the top of each of my hip bones and glide them to my midline. My right hand was an inch or two above my left. The same thing at the bottom of my ribcage... again, my right hand was slightly higher than my left. “My dear,” she said, “Your proprioception is a bit off, dontcha’ think??” We then went on to discuss muscle imbalance, posture, neural pathways, and next steps to kick start my proprioceptors as she worked diligently to get me and my body back into balance. I’ll save the compensatory conversation for next time, today I want to focus briefly on ***proprioception***

PROPRIOCEPTION= the body’s sense of its own position, balance, and movement, “body awareness,” or the “sixth sense.” In other words, this is the body “knowing” where it is and how to respond. For example, touching your nose with your hand, picking your feet up over the curb, or in my case, aligning yourself “straight” on the massage table.

Now, let’s apply this to horses (the same is true for dogs, cats, etc):



Proprioceptors are tiny neurological sensory receptors that provide information about joint angle, muscle length, and muscle tension, they are what synchronize movement. They are responsible for the skill a horse has navigating an extreme trail course, loading himself into a horse trailer, and the fluid, seemingly effortless “dance” of the dressage horse. Proprioception, as part of the neurological system, is paramount in the most graceful and exceptionally moving horse. The better one’s proprioception, the better the horse’s reflexes are. This in turn effects his coordination, endurance/stamina, and balance. If there is an injury to the body, the proprioceptors can become confused and the body will no longer move correctly, nor does it

have the much needed information to bring itself back to proper alignment (this can also be true due to other imbalances in the hooves, body, teeth/TMJ, and improper compensatory posture).



Now, how to correct this? Some ways include neuromuscular retraining and biofeedback, this helps by increasing awareness of muscular, and other postural holding patterns, allowing the body to become aware of the pattern, then make the choice to change on its own. Specific exercises, bodywork, and chiropractic, including addressing postural imbalance, looking at the TMJ, proper hoof balance, and body, are all ways to help. The horse is a prey animal; in the wild, this means that his proprioceptive ability is literally a matter of life or death. Thinking of proper functioning proprioceptors in this way exposes how important they are.



“Recent studies have shown that recognizing our own bodies depends upon integrated information from the senses of vision, touch and proprioception (the sense of how our bodies are positioned in space). These cues can easily be manipulated, leading to an altered sense of body ownership.” ~ Mo Costandi



I've included a few of links that may be helpful and are definitely educational:

<http://www.holistichorse.com/component/search/?searchword=proprioception&searchphrase=all&Itemid=101>

http://www.naturalhorse.com/zoomsearch/search.php?zoom_query=proprioception&zoom_per_page=20&zoom_and=0

<http://holistic-herd.com/article/what-you-must-know-about-equine-posture/>

<http://www.ridemagazine.com/horse/article/jec-ballou-improving-your-horses-proprioception>

With thoughts of joyful sunshine and balanced alignment,
Inez ☺