

Your Horse's Vision May Affect His Symmetry

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Like humans, most horses are right eye dominant. This means that when a human closes one eye to peek through a camera lens, they generally peer with the right eye while closing the left. Humans have a clear vision of what is directly in front of themselves, so they do not cause neck and shoulder problems due to right eye dominance. Horses, on the other hand, have no clear vision looking directly forward, so they have to bend their neck slightly to use the dominant eye.

When a horse is using their dominant eye, they have to use the neck flexors to turn their head slightly away from that side. The neck flexors and some of the shoulder stabilizers become involved in this repetitive motion. Each time the shoulder contracts to stabilize the extra weight load, it creates a one-sided development not found in the opposite shoulder. If a horse has problems with their sight, or eyes that are set very wide apart, these problems can be more exaggerated as their weight falls forward each time that they bend. It is a good idea to check your horse's symmetry often.

You can evaluate if your horse has compensatory development due to side dominance. Begin while mounted by looking down from the saddle when your horse is standing balanced and relaxed. The dominant side shoulder (Anterior Deltoid, specifically) will appear more muscled, and this will make the shoulder appear a little farther forward than the other. The Pectoral muscle will also appear more developed on the weight bearing or dominant side.

There are a few things that you can do to maintain symmetry in the horse with compensatory development of this type;

1. Always lead, tack, and mount the horse equally from each side.
2. Address any rider problems that may be contributing to the asymmetry of the horse.
3. Do some gentle warming and stretching exercises every day on the tighter side.
4. Pay close attention to exercise routines to be sure that each side gets the proper number of repetitions in order to build the weaker shoulder.

For an example of how the shift in weight feels, kneel down on all fours and turn your head to one side and back repeatedly. You will feel the weight of your torso loading the forward shoulder each time that you turn your head.

With just a few simple exercises, you can help your performance horse to maintain a balanced body with fewer injuries.