

# REVERSING EXERCISES - DOWNHILL

*Easy everyday exercises to improve and maintain your horses balance, and strength, engaging the cybernetic muscles.*



For prehabilitation and rehabilitation, using reversing exercises as a daily part of your warm-up and cool-down routine can assist in improving your horses balance, strength and co-ordination.

Using reversing as a regular training tool will help to develop the muscles in your horses back, as it lifts its entire back and hind quarters to perform this exercise. Horses who cannot lift their spines, will resist and be unable to complete the exercise correctly.

Starting in hand, find a gentle slope and face your horse with its head facing directly uphill. Calmly and quietly, ask your horse to take a few steps backwards down the slope. You can do this by applying light pressure to the horses nose (via the headcollar or with your hand), or by pressing lightly on your horses chest. In both instances, it helps to use a verbal command, such as "back" or "back up".

Once your horse takes a couple of step backwards, reward it by removing any pressure, and ask the horse to walk forwards (it also helps to use a verbal command, such as "good" or "good boy/girl"). Try to keep your horse straight through its whole body, neck and head while asking it to step backwards. If your horse twists its body, lifts its head, or shows other signs of resistance, it means the horse finds this exercise difficult.

Patience is key. Ask the horse again to take a few steps backwards down the hill, each time you reach a point of resistance (or 5-6 steps), walk forwards, reposition, and calmly ask again. (Don't worry, each time your horse steps forwards up the hill, it needs to engage its hindquarters to power forward. Win/Win!!).

If your horse consistently twists its body in one direction, use the hill to assist with correcting this. Instead of pointing your horse directly uphill, angle the horses body slightly, (30° -45° angle). Do this a few times in each direction.

## WHY REVERSING

Reversing, or reinback, helps to improve your horses proprioception and co-ordination, while helping to reduce the likelihood and frequency of injury.

It engages the entire muscular and skeletal system of the horse. It helps increase mobility in the lumbosacral and major spinal junctions while activating the spinal stabilizing muscles.

The entire body needs to work in balance in order for the horse to lift its legs, shift its weight backwards, and step back. The horse needs to figure out where its limbs are in relation to the ground.

The first thing the horse needs to do, is lift its back in order to raise its legs and move them in a backwards manner in the reinback motion.

**All ridden horses need the ability to lift their back. This makes them comfortable and able to perform daily tasks such as managing terrain as well as more strenuous exercises such as galloping, jumping, collection and lateral movements.**

Ideally, you are looking for your horse to be able to take 5-6 steps backwards, on any angle down a slope (start with a 45° angle), balanced, with no signs of resistance. Once your horse can accomplish this, you can increase difficulty by adding a saddle, then eventually a rider.

The keys things to look for are straightness, rhythm and balance, Does your horse rush? Does your horse twist in one direction? Raise its head? Swish it's tail? These are all signs of discomfort.

Once your horse is comfortably and confidently performing these exercises in hand, you can make them more challenging, by increasing the gradient of the slope, or adding weight. Add a saddle first, no rider. A saddle itself not only adds weight, but also a level of restriction around the ribcage, similar to a resistance band. Once your horse can perform all exercises maintaining balance and rhythm, firstly in hand, then with a saddle, you can then increase difficulty further, by adding the additional weight of a rider.



**Asking your horse to reverse, or reinback, downhill allows it more space to lift and place its feet behind.**

**The downhill slope, means the ground where the horse places its feet, is lower than the starting point. This gives stiffer horses more chance to complete the exercise, but also challenges each horses proprioception as they figure out where their feet are in relation to their body and the ground below them.**