

PELVIC MOBILITY *Pilates Class*

By Rebecca Ashton

Accredited dressage coach and qualified pilates instructor



Now that we have found our core and have control of our leg, we are going to look at the mobility of the pelvis. This month I introduce a piece of equipment, the fit ball. It is cheap to buy and adds a new dimension to your exercises.

These exercises will help you to locate any blockages in the pelvis and waist area. They also help to disassociate the upper and lower body. This is beneficial because the pelvis, in part, "belongs" to the horse while the shoulder girdle (top half of the torso) "belongs" to the rider. The pelvis has to be stable to support the backbone but also have controlled mobility to move with the horse in a three dimensional manner. If not, the risk is that the flow of movement through the horse's back is blocked and this would lead to a stiff and possibly hollow back in both horse and rider. The rider's back also needs to be able to guide the horse through the extended as well as collected paces.

The lower body of the rider should be constantly making small adjustments to remain in balance with the horse. This allows the rider's upper body to "float" effortlessly on top. It is important to do these exercises in a slow and controlled fashion so as not to smooth over the blockages by using momentum. The body needs time to compute where the blockages are and what muscles it needs to either stretch or contract to eliminate the imbalance. We are looking for evenness in all directions. You may find one direction is easier than the other. Remember, this is what your horse is feeling through the saddle. If you are too blocked or too loose in one direction, this could negatively influence your horse.

Glossary

***Neutral Spine:** This is the shape of the spine when all the vertebrae are stacked one upon the other in alignment. The spine is concave in the lower back and the neck. These natural curves allow for good shock absorption. This is what we term a neutral spine position and we want to maintain this alignment when we ride.

***Core:** Your core is made up of some very deep muscles that help support your structure. They form a type of box in your lower abdomen. The top of the box is the diaphragm, the sides are formed by the internal obliques, and at the back is the multifidus which supports the vertebrae. At the front is the transversus abdominis and on the bottom is the pelvic floor. That's a lot of muscles to think about, so we focus mainly on the transversus and pelvic floor. Good breathing techniques will help take care of the diaphragm and correct exercise technique will support healthy obliques and multifidus. There are many ways to switch on the core, but the best way is to use imagery. Think that you are gently tightening a hipster belt, drawing up a pelvic elevator, stopping the flow of urine or melting your lower abs into your spine.

***Lateral breathing:** This is style of breathing where we breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. It helps support the core. Think of filling up the lungs without losing the engagement of the core or lifting the shoulders up. Remember to breathe into the sides and back of the lungs, not just the front. Don't forget, if you're not used to good breathing techniques, the diaphragm and the intercostal muscles that control the rib cage will need time to learn to work properly, just like any other muscle.

The Set Up:

→ Find **neutral spine***, sitting on the ball, feet hip-joint-width apart (a little wider for "Canter Trans" version and hip circles)

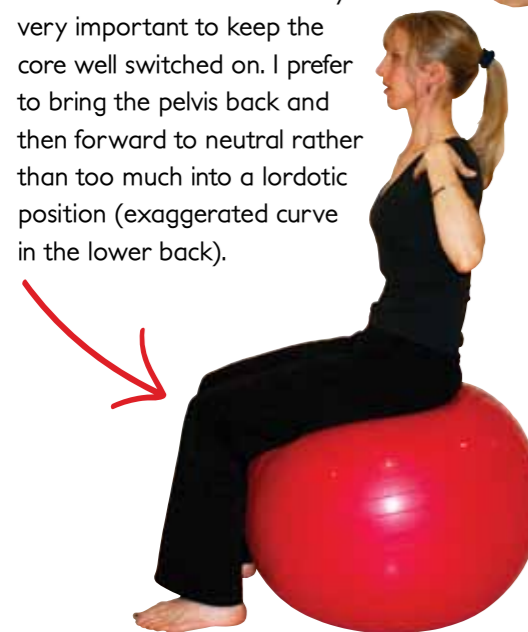
→ Switch off your outer muscles, relaxing your legs and arms.

→ On an in-breath, using the **lateral breathing*** method, switch on your **core*** by imagining the lower abs melting inwards towards your spine and lifting up gently through the pelvic floor. When breathing, imagine filling up your lungs completely, including the sides and back, not just the front. The shoulders remain relaxed and still.

Instruction Of Move:

→ **Pelvic tilts back and forward:**

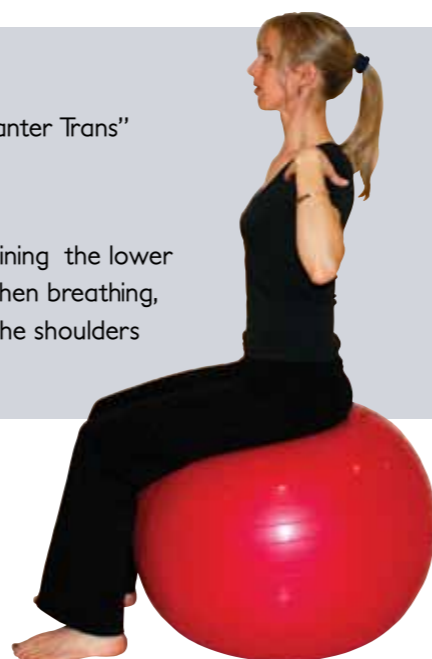
Be careful not to tilt the pelvis forward too much (increasing the hollow in the lower back excessively) and put pressure on the vertebrae of the lower back. This is why it is very important to keep the core well switched on. I prefer to bring the pelvis back and then forward to neutral rather than too much into a lordotic position (exaggerated curve in the lower back).



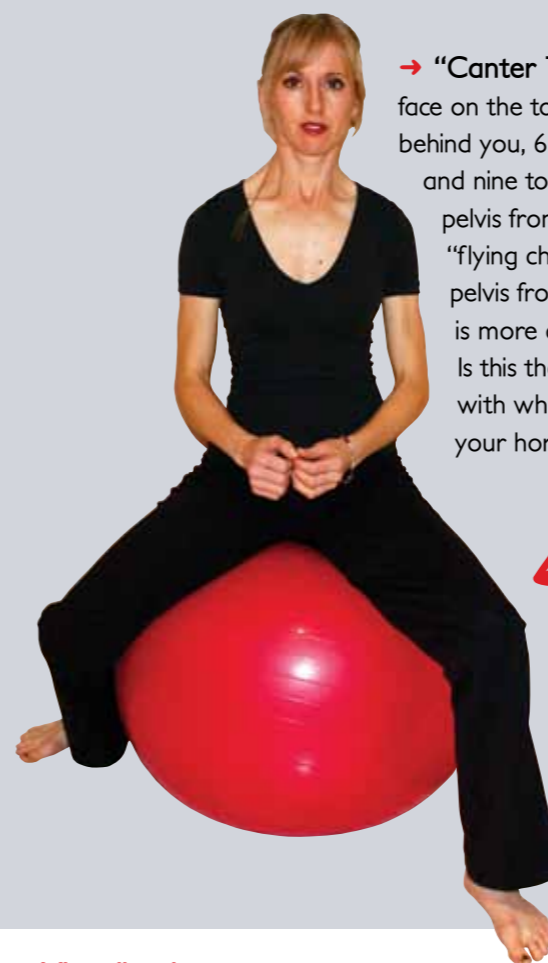
→ **Pelvic tilts sideways:**

You want to think of keeping your shoulders still. Don't let your shoulders swaying all over the place! Think of bringing your ribs and hip closer together on the side you are compressing. Keep the ribs over your hips and not popping out one side or the other.

→ **Hip Circles:** Describe a big circle with your hips around your shoulders, which remain still and centred. Check for any areas that feel blocked or where you want to "cut corners" and lose the correct circumference of the circle.



→ **"Canter Trans":** Imagine a clock face on the top of the ball with 12 behind you, 6 in front, three to your left and nine to your right. Move your pelvis from 11 to 5 and then do a "flying change" and move your pelvis from 1 to 7. Note if one side is more challenging than the other. Is this the same side you struggle with when you ask for canter from your horse?



Visualisations:

- Equal weight on both seatbones
- Really use the waist on the sides and front and back pelvic tilts
- Slow and steady
- Think of doing the hula when doing hip circles
- Pretend you are a belly dancer

Watch Out For:

- Shoulders moving or hunching instead of the waist working
- Holding breath
- Movements not symmetrical
- Losing length through the body