

The Weight & Seat Aids, Your Kinesthetic Sense and Horse Performance, Part 1 of 3

By: [Michele Morseth](#)

January 29, 2010



Photo A: The rider is pushing her horse over to the right with her left leg and her weight is on the left side of the saddle.



[Click an Image to Enlarge](#)

Part 1 of 3

Simply put, given a chance, horses will go where you put your weight. Unfortunately riders often do not put their weight in the direction they want to go because they do not know how. Riding a horse that responds to the weight aids, or to how you change the weight and contact of your seat, is exhilarating—hardly a rein or leg is needed. The horse seems to respond to where you look, read your mind, and be directly connected to your spirit. No matter what sort of riding you do, you want to get top performance from your horse by supporting your horse's balance and movement and this starts with an accurate kinesthetic sense, or sense of your body and movement.

Many horses are taught to ignore the rider's shifts in weight because their rider does not have the body-awareness to attune to the position of their own body and weight. The rider's attention ignores the body, directs hands and legs to control the horse, and seeks to tune into the horse's body, not realizing the horse, to balance, is adjusting to the rider's body position, fluency, and weight distribution. Professionals and amateurs alike often do not honestly know what they are doing with their own body so they teach the horse to ignore anything but the rein and leg aids. They move around too much, bounce on the saddle, hold their shoulders tight, sit off to one side, hit their horse with the spurs without knowing it, and use the reins for balance. Sound familiar? If so, you are not alone because lack of body awareness is common. The good news is that while common, this is fixable.

You may be one who thinks you are weighting the inside or outside seat bone but your perception of how you are moving your body is so poor, you are rarely doing what you want to do. Instead, you do something other than what you think you are doing. Sadly, as a child, you began to listen to external commands about posture and movement rather than your own innate, natural self-awareness. Perhaps you have had pain or injuries and over time, you have lost the ability to attune accurately to your own balance and movement. Fortunately accurate self-perception can be regained, if you take the time to develop the awareness of your own body's movement. If you are not someone who naturally has a keen kinesthetic sense you will want to reclaim yours--if not for yourself, for your horse.

When the rider's body is not supporting the horse's movement, the rider is constantly working against herself--her body is telling the horse one thing while her leg and rein aids are telling it something else. Aids tend to get stronger, as the rider works to get the horse to obey conflicting signals.

Riders are often taught to use stronger aids by trainers who do not understand the basic principle that horses want to remain in balance. They want to remain upright and not fall down and they want to find an easy way to do this--like a person carrying a backpack, horses want to remain under the rider's weight.

Let us look at an example of a rider trying to leg-yield their horse. The rider, trying to make the horse leg-yield right uses the left leg to move it over. Accidentally she puts her weight to the left. The horse wants to stay under her so he tries to go left and she spurs harder to make the horse go right, ending up with even more weight to the left. The horse struggles to move right when the rider's weight is to the left (see photo). In a weight-supported leg-yield to the right, the rider would first put her weight slightly to the right in the direction of travel, and then use the left leg to encourage the horse to follow the weight shift.

All three of the photos above show leg-yield right. In photos A & B the rider is pushing her horse over to the right with her left leg and her weight is on the left side of the saddle. In photo B she is trying to get right by leaning. Her seat is telling the horse to move left while her leg and rein aids are telling it to move right. This is confusing for the horse and hard work for both. In photo C the rider has rethought her seat position. She is leg yielding right and has shifted her weight to her right seat bone to support the horse moving to the right. The horse finds it much easier to respond to the rider's request.

Ask your horse two simple questions: "Have I taught you to tune out my seat because I don't know where I'm putting my weight as I ride? Can we work together to develop weight consciousness?" Then work on developing your sense of yourself on a loose rein in the arena or on a wide trail. Walk your horse around and slowly shift your weight to the right seat bone. Stay there, not exaggerating the weight shift; just be patient and find out what the horse does naturally. If he has learned to ignore shifts of weight in the saddle, it may take some time but eventually he will start to move under your weight—this would be a good time to praise him and tell him from now on your seat and weight will have meaning to both of you. Experiment with your own changes of balance and the effect this has on your horse. As you learn to be more aware of your own body, you will be able to incorporate meaningful seat aids into your riding and you will get quicker, more accurate responses and better performance from your horse.