

EQUINE LAMENESS EXAM

Characterization of Lameness

Exercises done include:

- Straight line walk & trot with a loose line to the halter so that the movement of the horse is not restricted.
- Lunge on soft & hard surfaces which may exacerbate lameness in the affected limb.
- Horse is ridden
 - To assess weight bearing lameness and swinging limb lameness
- Flexion and/or extension test responses
 - Flex both affected and non-affected limb for approximately 1 minute before immediately trotting the horse.
 - Look to see if the lameness is consistent, intermittent, improving or worsening with work.
- Because lameness may be caused by neuromuscular disorders, a complete neurologic examination should be part of the lameness examination whenever an obvious painful or mechanical cause has not been found. The examination should include evaluation of cranial nerve and upper and lower motor neuron function.
 - Observing the horse execute movements such as turning short, backing, “hopping” on one forelimb (with the other forelimb held up), negotiating a curb, turning in tight circles, and walking uphill and downhill should be done. These tests help determine whether reduced proprioception, weakness, or spasticity may be the cause of the gait abnormality.

NOTE: To establish consistency, the entire examination should involve the same handler, the same footing when the horse is under saddle, and the same surfaces under foot. The horse should be controlled so that it is trotting at a useful, repeatable pace to evaluate the lameness.