

TACK & TRAINING

SADDLE FIT Q & A

**By Jochen Schleese, Certified Master Saddler,
Equine and Saddle Ergonomist.**

... with thanks to Dr. James Warson, MD

Question: Saddle Fit and Osteoporosis –
Why is this Important to Consider?

ANSWER:

The demographics of the majority of our market are such that osteoporosis (or osteopenia – the onset of osteoporosis) is simply an all too common issue that cannot be ignored in its ramifications regarding riding. For whatever reason, it is a disease that we find in many of our clientele, and questions about it are numerous.

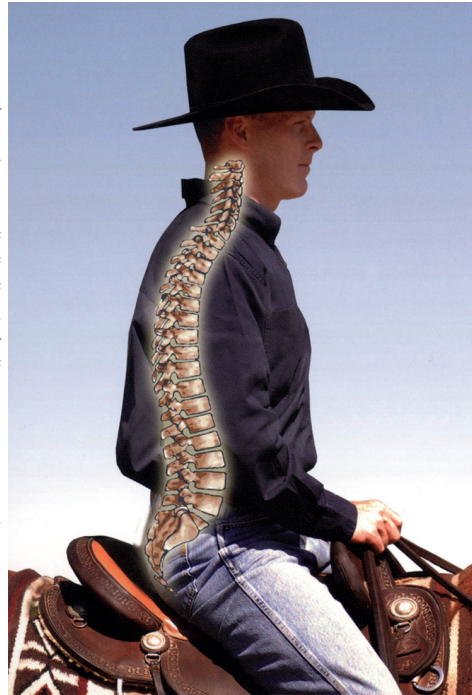
Osteoporosis is simply a softening of bone. Once menopause takes place and estrogen levels drop, there is resorption of marrow bone and proteins. This softens the bone and makes it subject to collapse when external forces are applied. Bones such as the hips and the vertebrae of the spine are usually most affected. External forces may be applied to these bones two ways in riding; either abruptly, as when a rider is thrown, or chronically when minute forces combine slowly over time to steadily weaken bone. Both should be treated by recognition of the disease's presence, suitable lifestyle modifications, appropriate use of medications and exercise, and correct choices in saddle, pad, horse, and style of riding.

There are often no specific symptoms until there is collapse of bone. Fracture of the vertebrae will produce pain and possibly loss of neurological function such as movement or bladder control. Until then, the only clue may be slow development of a humpback posture with the head carried somewhat forward. While this has classically been seen in older women, it must be remembered that 20% of osteoporosis occurs in men.



35-50% of women over 50 will have at least one vertebral fracture, but only one third of these will be recognized! Nowhere is correct saddle fit more important than for an osteoporotic rider. Correct saddle fit reduces the horse's movements to avoid pain or discomfort resulting in less movement for the rider to counteract through their muscle movements which attach to and compress porotic bone when they contract. Jumping and eventing are out as choices for osteoporotic riders. The risk of sudden impact injury is simply too great, and the consequences too severe.

While we can't alter our genetic profile, we can effect lifestyle changes that will reduce the likelihood of osteoporosis. Use of heavy amounts of alcohol, high protein diets, muscular inactivity, use of steroid medications, certain inhibitors of stomach acid production, and inadequate vitamin D intake all contribute to inadequate bone strength.



Jochen Schleese, German Certified Master Saddler and Saddle Ergonomist, teaches saddle fit principles to protect horse and rider from long-term damage caused by ill-fitting saddles. www.saddlefit4life.com 702-370-1199 info@saddlefit4life.com www.saddlesforwomen.com



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