

TACK & TRAINING SADDLE FIT Q & A

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

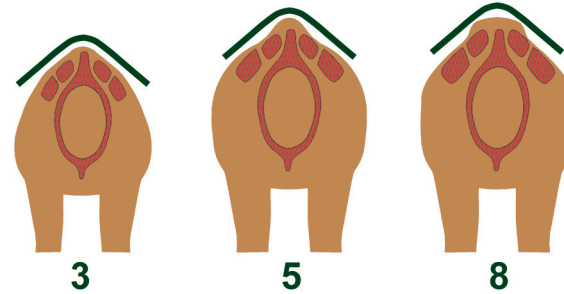
Question: How Often do I need to have my saddle adjusted?

ANSWER:

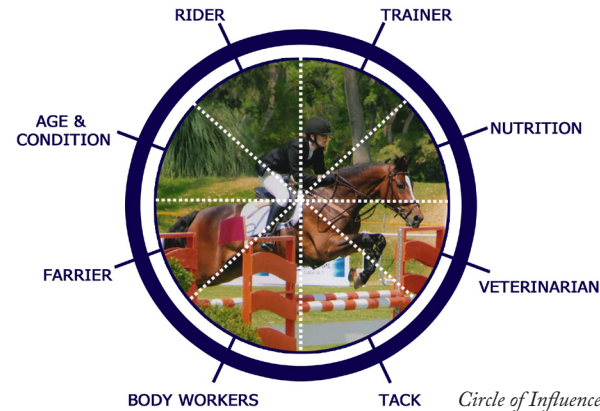
The horse will change its conformation over the course of his life due to many influences, least of which are actually his age and level of training. The saddle and the work of the saddle fitter must never be considered in isolation, since all of the pieces of the circle of influence are somewhat interdependent. For example, if the training methods or the horse's nutrition are altered, the horse's conformation will change. It follows logically that the saddle will no longer fit – and the reason is not because the saddle fitter did a bad job but because his back shape has been altered.

Saddle fitting is an attempt to prevent long term damage to the horse's back by alleviating pressure on the reflex points, and to distribute the rider's weight optimally over its back. It is a given that over the course of a horse's life he will actually change his three-dimensional back shape many times. Just like humans – as we grow up our bodies change, as we exercise or train our bodies definitely change, and as we age or change the way we eat our bodies change. The same is true for the horse.

All things being equal, the shape of the horse's back and especially the length of the saddle support area (from the base of the withers to the last thoracic vertebra) will change most significantly at ages 3, 5 and 8. This can cause frustration for the rider as it will definitely require a saddle fit adjustment to accommodate wider shoulders, higher withers, and more muscling on the back. As a



Training during this time will affect the muscular conformation and, as a result, the three-dimensional back shape and its saddle-support area will change.



The saddle-support area of the horse's back is effectively in the middle of the longissimus muscle. The saddle must never be touching in the red triangular area and not go beyond the 18th thoracic vertebra.

rule we generally suggest annual maintenance check-ups and tune ups regardless; this frequency will increase if there are extenuating circumstances such as increased training, changed nutrition, or any of the factors in the 'circle of influence' to the horse which can ultimately affect saddle fit.

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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