

YOGA

For Equestrians



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Foreword

All of us in the equestrian world know how important it is to be fit. Talent and passion alone are not enough to get us to the top. Thankfully, many more of the equestrian athletes realize the importance of specific exercises to help enhance their riding skills, and make the effort look effortless in the arena or on the course.

It's rare that you come across standout teacher like Daniela. Since her first riding lesson, I was impressed with her body awareness, coordination, and ability to remain relaxed in challenging situations. I came to learn that her field of expertise is yoga, and soon I joined her for practice.

I witnessed her progress as a rider, while I became amazed with my own progress due to the practices Daniela recommended. Those practices strengthen and limber the body, creating the foundation for riders to manifest their talent and achieve higher levels of performance.

Her knowledge is vast, her creativity and energy are virtually inexhaustible. I was one of the first to benefit from Equifit Yoga, the program she designed with the rider's needs in mind. This program changed not only my riding, but influenced my health and my life. As such, I wholeheartedly recommended it to riders of all ages and levels of ability.

As a very busy rider, therapist, wife and mother of three boys, I greatly appreciate the versatility of Equifit Yoga. The poses and exercises once learned can be done separately, in few minutes-long segments throughout the day. The information is concise, everything is explained in detail in an easy to read book. The video adds value by making the practice accessible to everyone, including those unfamiliar with yoga.

Deceivingly simple and unintimidating, this practice is for you, if you truly aim to become a better, safer, and healthier rider!

Namaste, heels down, and legs on!

Veronica Mac Loughlin

PATH International Therapeutic Riding Instructor

Alpharetta, Georgia

1 Introduction

1.1 A Simple Practice to Improve Your Riding

Would you like to speed up progress, and maximize the outcome of your riding lessons? Your goals become much more attainable when your body is strong and flexible, resilient yet graceful like a blade made of the finest tempered steel.

Enhance your riding skills through building stronger core muscles, limbering your legs, reducing internal tensions, and increasing body awareness for better balance.

Here is a simple, yet very effective, practice to help you in this pursuit.

Equifit Yoga addresses specifically the needs of equestrian athletes, regarding the development of strength flexibility and balance. Like all athletes, equestrians, whether competitors or recreational riders, regardless of style, age, and level of ability, want to improve their skills, and minimize the risk of injury.

The poses and sequences in this program address different issues riders may have, such as:

- back pain resulting from falls or improper alignment
- tight calves and stiff ankles, limiting the ability to ride with heels down
- abdominal muscles weakness, leading to altered posture and lower back pain;
- stiff and chronically sore hips and thighs
- tight chest and weak upper back, causing rounded shoulders and neck pain
- weak back muscles and inflexible spine that compromise two-point position

Equifit Yoga enhances balance and body awareness to create a more stable seat, prevent falls, and prepare the rider to handle them when they occur.

We suggest you read first the book, get familiar with the poses and learn about their specific benefits, then practice with the video tutorial.

Get into the habit of practicing regularly, at least once a week, and you'll be pleasantly surprised with the results.

Visit the [Equifit Yoga forum](#) on [siminayoga](#) to ask questions, get support, and share your progress.

Enjoy the ride!

Daniela Simina

2 Practice

2.1 Centering, breath, and alignment

Benefits

- Centering calms the mind, and develops focus. Together with breathing, it helps you relax, and override the load of stressful moments.
- The body alignment as practiced in centering, reinforces proper body alignment during riding.
- Sitting on the floor, as simple as crisscross, enhances hip flexibility.

Technique

- Sit on the floor with your legs crossed and straight back (Figure 1). If this is not comfortable for your hips and lower back, or if your back is rounding, sit on folded blankets or cushions. If you experience discomfort in your knees, use yoga blocks to support them (Figure 2). Close the eyes to screen out distractions.
- Bring the awareness to the breath, especially to the inhalation. With each breath in, feel your spine stretching taller.
- Feel the head floating above the shoulders, lifting gently through the crown.
- Feel your tailbone, and intend it to stretch downward, like a plant sending its root into the earth.
- Use the upward moving quality you associate with the inhalation to straighten your back, stretching nicely along the spine, without stiffening.
- Bring the awareness to the exhalation.
- On the next breath out, draw gently inward from below the navel. Get the feeling of your lower abdominal muscles engaging to support the back, and give more stability to your posture. For a couple of breaths, stay present to the dialog between exhalation engaging your abs, and the lower back positioning itself.



Figure 1: Sitting unsupported

- Bring the awareness to the shoulders, and feel them releasing tension with each exhale.
- Feel the arms soft and heavy, and have your hands resting on your knees or thighs, with palms facing up or down, whichever feels more comfortable.
- With each breath out, feel the thighs getting softer, heavier, and more relaxed.
- Scan your body for tension from top to bottom, and wherever you feel tension or pain, wherever you are aware of the existence of an injury, pause briefly and allow your breath to infuse the area for as long as you deem necessary.
- Start with the scalp, your face, the neck, and shoulders: go down the arms and into your hands.
- Keep scanning your back body, your front body, allowing your awareness to penetrate deep inside, and feel into the internal organs.
- Go all the way down into the root of the body, into the pelvic floor, and farther into the hips, legs, and feet.
- Allow your awareness to encompass the whole body, and maintain it like this for few breaths.

- Don't force your heels to meet the floor. Relax into the pose instead: this will encourage your leg muscles to lengthen, and the heels will lower by themselves.

2.4 Seated hero pose

Benefits

- It stretches the front thighs muscles, the quads, that get tight in all athletes, riders making no exceptions.
- Stretches those muscles that run along the front side of the lower leg and top of the foot. Tightness in these muscles causes the ankle to stiffen. Stiff ankles are more difficult to relax in the stirrup, and their lack of softness prevents the heel to drop.
- Stretching the thigh muscles makes the knee joint suppler. Supple knees enable the rider to follow the horse's motion more organically at trot, in two points position, or during standing up in stirrups exercises; they are very important for shock absorption
- Rotates internally the thighbone, stretching gently the gluteus maximus. In riders, the gluteus is prone to tightness, and contributes to back pain because of this. Therefore, stretching the gluteus could help alleviate or prevent back pain.
- Practice regularly, helps to loosen up the hip joint.

Technique

- Lower the knees down to the floor, and stand up on your knees.
- Stack a couple of yoga blocks, place them longitudinally, straddle, and sit on top of them (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Hero pose, supported

- Your lower legs are parallel to each other.
- The feet are pointing back, and the tops of your feet are turned to face the floor.
- Maintain the lower abdominal muscles engaged to prevent lower back arching.
- If you would like more of a stretch in your thighs, remove one block, and sit lower.
- You can remove all blocks if you want and sit on a folded blanket or directly on the floor (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Hero pose without support

- If you need more intensity, bring the arms behind with the palms on the floor or on another set of blocks, and lean back just enough to give your quadriceps the stretch they need (Figure 9).
- Maintain for 10 breaths cycles, or more if you like.

3 Final Recommendations

Let's review some of the steps to keep this practice fun, and get results in the shortest time.

After you've read this book, try to do the poses on your own following the written description of the steps, and the pictures.

Now play the video and follow along. Since you have become familiar with the poses, following the verbal guidance will be easy. The captions on the screen will help you remember the focus of each pose, and remind about its purpose.

Practice the whole routine at least once a week, using the video. If you don't have time to do the whole program at once, split it into two segments to be completed at different times within the day.

While repetition is necessary to learn a skill and to perfect the form, variety is also necessary. (How many times did you ride a circle, until it finally *became* a circle, with your horse bending all the way throughout? However, there are many other objectives to pursue in a lesson, besides perfecting that circle.)

Yoga practice is no different. So, once you have learned the poses, you can still follow the routine as described, or play mix and match! Create your own combinations: you may use one or more of the poses above to stretch right after riding, and you can chose do the abdominal exercises daily. You know you have chosen the right combination if your body responds positively, with less stiffness and shorter recovery times after riding.

Get started NOW, be consistent, and have your work and dedication pay off!

Visit the [Equifit Yoga forum](#) on [siminayoga](#) to ask questions, get support, and share your progress.

Enjoy your practice, and have a great ride!

4 Resources

Visit the [Member Area](#) on [siminayoga](#) for additional bonus resources:

- Core Building Yoga (PDF)
- One, Two, Three, Back Pain Free (PDF)

5 About the Author

Daniela Simina is a yoga teacher, energy therapist, equestrian athlete, and author.

She teaches yoga for riders who want to improve their skills, maximize their potential, and be in charge of their wellbeing. Daniela's programs focus on core strengthening and balance as prerequisites for increased stability, and preventing falls. She emphasizes development of flexibility to prevent and overcome injuries and related physical discomfort.

To find out more, sign-up on [Equifit](#)'s mailing list on [siminayoga](#) and follow [SiminaYoga](#) on [Facebook](#).