

Improve your riding in a Murdoch Minute - #1 Your Wrist Connection

By Wendy Murdoch

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Do you have trouble keeping your shoulders back or staying in balance when working on the flat? Have you had trouble keeping your position when you jump? Do you use a crest release (hands on the horse's neck) and yet still pitch forward on landing? Here's a quick tip to improve your hand position and overall balance which you can practice while working in the arena or over fences.

Next time you ride pay attention to your wrists, that area between your hand and your forearm. There are 8 bones in your wrist called carpal bones. The human wrist is the equivalent of the horse's knee (carpus) on the front leg. The bones in your wrist allow you to move your hand in many different ways. However, when we ride we need to be able to stabilize the wrist in order to help to maintain balance in the saddle and a soft contact with the horse's mouth.

Good wrist alignment allows the information coming from the rider's seat to transmit down the rein to the horse's mouth and visa versa. If we break at the wrist we can interrupt this critical line of communication. A faulty wrist position can also be a symptom or cause of more serious rider position problems.



Correct wrist position for a crest release when jumping. Notice the wrists are straight allowing the hand to be in line with the forearm. She is punching an imaginary wall in front of her hand, the fingers of the closed hand rest on the sides of the horse's neck.



The wrists are cocked in breaking the line from the hand to the forearm. This will cause the rider to pitch forward.

A good wrist position creates a good hand position. If you were to gently punch your soft fist into the wall you would want your fist meet the wall squarely, Force can transmit through your wrist into your forearm. If you punched the wall with your wrists cocked in or rounded out the force would cause your wrist to buckle. Obviously it would be a poor punch and potentially damaging to your wrist, hand and arm.

If you keep your wrist straight you can gently punch the wall meeting it with all four knuckles squarely. This wrist alignment will help you to maintain a good overall balance in the saddle by connecting your hands through your wrists to your arms and body.

Good alignment of the wrists is a neutral position within two planes of movement: up and down and in and out. To find a good neutral wrist position start by making soft fists with your hands. Gently cock your wrists in, then round them out. Find the middle position between these two extremes. Next cock your wrists down (pinky gets closer to the underside of your forearm) or up (thumb gets closer to your forearm). Find the middle again. Finally locate the middle between

these four directions.

When the wrist is straight the line of force from the hand can go through the wrist to the arm, shoulders and body. Good alignment will help keep the rest of you in balance rather than tipping forward or rounding your shoulders.

Use this Murdoch Minute as a 'body position self-check' as you approach a fence, a corner or turn in the arena before you use your hands. This simple exercise will improve your overall confidence and balance when riding your horse. And remember - enjoy the ride!



The wrists are rounded out breaking the line from the hand to the forearm. Her hands are punching into the horse's neck rather than an imaginary wall in front of her. The rider will tend to round the head, neck and shoulders.

Wendy Murdoch resides in Washington, VA and is an international riding instructor/clinician. She travels worldwide teaching riders of all levels and disciplines how to improve the horse's performance by improving their body position. Her book, *Simplify Your Riding* is available in stores and at www.wendymurdoch.com