

# Conditioning Plan

A step-by-step guide  
to conditioning your horse to  
prevent injury and avoid  
disappointment

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# Hello and Welcome!

*Fitness takes time, there are no shortcuts.*

Preventing injury is the name of the game with your fitness program.

And,

You have to have a program.

Sudden increase in work with your horse can lead to injury and lameness.

~Laura Kelland-May

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Be Extraordinary!



Laura Kelland May

# CONDITIONING PROGRAM



## Preparations

- Check your equipment.

Gather your tack, and review the fit. Your horse may have changed shape since the last time your saddle was used. Check stitching and condition of the leather. Oil and apply condition to leather and have stitching repaired.

- Have your horse shod or trimmed. Have a balanced hoof to prevent injury.
- Review your nutrition and feed schedule. These may change as you increase your workload.
- Get up to date with your veterinary health records.
- Worm your horse if due.



## Introduction

This conditioning plan is a general guide. Each time you work with your horse consider if your horse is able to progress to the next stage.

Gradual training and systematic development will get you to your goal. Regular consistent training will help develop your horse to insure safe progress.

When you've completed your first goal, set another, and keep improving and maintaining your horse's fitness.

## Effects of Training

Any activity that increases the metabolic activity of muscles (the rate at which they are using energy) can be considered exercise.

Although exercise always uses up energy, if it's not well-planned and with a specific focus, it's unlikely to result in an increase in fitness in the same way that training would.

## Training Tip

### ✓ Training tip

Stay on secure footing to start. For example sand arena footing. Then begin to vary the type of ground you are working on.

Gravel roads, grass fields.

The different ground cover will help develop your horse's ability to adapt to different terrain.



Training brings about changes in your horse's:

- **Cardiovascular system.** The size of their muscle will increase. This means their heart can pump more blood around his body with each heartbeat.
- **Muscles.** Their ability to use oxygen efficiently improves.
- **Skeleton.** Bone remodels in response to exercise, producing more bone where the stress is greatest and reducing bone where stress is less.
- **Tendons and ligaments** become stronger.
- **Ability to recover.** They will recover quicker.



## Training Tip

✓ *Training tip*

*Horses heart and cardiovascular fitness develops quicker than their bones, tendons and ligaments. This is why they often feel “fresh”. It is important to develop their ligaments and tendons by doing slower development exercises.*

## STAGE I. WEEK I

# Introductory Work

### Week 1 - Walking In Hand

- It may sound like a pain to have to walk your horse for a week, but you will find that walking will help develop your horse.
- Walking in straight lines and including up/down hills will develop muscles faster.
- If you saddle up and start riding right away those muscles that have not been developed will get sore too fast and you could cause injury. Take it slowly and walk for approx.20 minutes for 5 days during week 1.



*Start off slowly and gradually increase your intensity.*

# STAGE I. WEEK 2 & 3

## Introductory Work

### Week 2 - Walking In The Tack

- Saddle up and climb on board. Walk for 30 - 40 minutes.
- Avoid soft spongy footing. Stay on secure footing to develop tendons and ligaments.
- Be aware of horses who may be frisky or feeling fresh. Have an experienced person on the ground to assist you if necessary.
- Keep monitoring your horse, the saddle fit and watch for any rubbing, soreness and pain. If you see your saddle is not fitting properly switch to a different saddle or have a professional come in to have your saddle adjusted.
- Incorporate walking over poles to avoid boredom and to help develop your horse's muscles.

### Week 3 - Introduce the Trot

- Oftentimes horses at this stage start to feel stronger and their muscles are getting stronger and fit. Trotting work will help to develop their fitness.
  - Introduce 30 seconds to 1 minute of trot and then back to 3 minutes of walking. The trot segment develops aerobic fitness. The walk portion allows the horse to recover their breathing.
  - Avoid circles. Stay on straight lines and encourage forward energy.
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# STAGE 2. WEEK 4

# Development Work

## Week 4 - Develop the Trot

- Intergrate flatwork walk and trot including circles and changes of rein.
- Introduce trotting over trot rails. Either single poles for a green horse or easy distances for more experienced horses that are returning to work after being “let down”.
- Include more bending exercises. These can be passive in hand bending with help from carrot stretches and also from more lateral suppleness exercises.



*Keep track of your progress in a journal or calendar.*

-LAURA



## STAGE 2. WEEK 5 & 6

# Development Work

### Week 5 - Introduce the Canter

- In addition to your other consistent work include some canter. Do your first canters in a forward seat off your horse's back.
- When planning your training, increase either duration OR intensity. If you are riding for longer periods of time, do not, as well, increase the intensity or speed. For example, if you are starting to incorporate canter work, then it is wise to reduce the length of time you are riding. If you have been gradually increasing your workouts to 40 minutes, when you start to canter, keep the canter in your workout (increase of intensity) but reduce the total length of your training session (duration).

### Week 6 - Increase Canter

- Increase the duration of your cantering.
  - Include riding circles, lateral exercises such as leg yield and shoulder-in.
  - Develop longitudinal suppling and strengthening exercises including lengthening and shortening of stride and transitions.
  - Allow a proper warm up and cool down time to ensure your horse is ready to work and to be properly cooled down before taking them back to the stable.
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# STAGE 3. WEEK 7.

## Building Muscle & Stamina

### Week 7 - Introduce Discipline Specific

- Start to introduce discipline specific exercises into your program.
- Include work over trot poles and gymnastics at easy striding and low heights
- Check your nutrition regimen and adjust if necessary to accommodate your horse's needs as a result of the increase in activity.
- Review your tack fit and adjust if necessary.



*Increase intensity  
OR  
duration  
but not both.*

-LAURA

# STAGE 3. WEEK 8 & 9

## Building Muscle & Stamina

### Week 8 - Keep Monitoring

- Monitor your horse's fitness. Keep a journal of your horse's progress including specifics such as temperature, pulse and respiration. Note if things are unusual. Keeping track of vitals is your first step to understand your horse's health.
- Practice specific exercises and drills that you may find in your competition.
- Start building over fences into your training sessions.

### Week 9 -

- Prepare for competition.



### Training Tip

When you introduce the trot, begin with a short duration and gradually build up to 5 minutes. Let your horse guide you.

If they are laboring and breathing hard, allow them a chance to recover before trotting again. Likewise for the canter. Introduce short duration and gradually increase.

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## Conditioning Tips

1. Understand your horse's normal "TPR".  
Temperature,  
Pulse and  
Respiration.  
Recording and tracking at regular intervals will give you a baseline to measure your horse's fitness.
2. Vary your routine.  
Include trail rides, hacks as well as arena work to prevent fatigued muscles and ligaments and prevent boredom.  
Plan a "rest day" to allow the horse time to rebuild their muscles.
3. Exercise over a variety of different terrain. This helps the horse develop and improves their ability to perform on different services.



# Thank you!

This is a sample conditioning program. There are many factors you have to consider. Finding out what works for you and for your horse is important.

Depending on breed, discipline, the condition of your horse when you start and your own personal fitness should also be considered.

~Laura Kelland-May



## Would You Like Some Assistance?

[Schedule a Call](#)

*As an avid equestrian myself, I built a brand around capturing the story behind the love and bond between a person and their horse.*



Be Extraordinary!



Laura Kelland May

## EXAMPLE FITNESS PLAN

		Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Stage 1	Week1	Walking 20 minutes	Day off	Walking 25 min.	Walking 25 min.	Walking 30 min.	Rest Day	Walking 30 min.
	Week 2	Walking 30 min.	Day off	Walking 30 min.	Walking 35 min	Walking 35 min	Rest Day	Walking 35 min.
	Week 3	Intro trot	Day off	Intro trot 1 min. Trot 3 min. WalkTotal ride = 30 min.	1 min trot 3 min walk total ride = 30 min.	1 min trot 3 min walk total ride = 30 min.	Rest Day.	1 min trot 3 min walk total ride = 30 min.

Check your saddle fit regularly. If you suspect a sore back, contact vet and physio.

Stage 2	Week 4	30 min.Intro circlesChanges of rein	Day off	40 min.Hacking light work	40 minCircles changes of rein	30 minIntro to poles	Rest Day	40 min.Hacking light work
	Week 5	40 min.Introduce canter	Day off	40 minutesCircles and schooling figures	40 minutesTrot poles	45 minHacking light work	Rest Day	40 minutes gradually increase canter.
	Week 6	45 minutesSchooling figures, circles	Day off	45 minutesSchooling w/t poles	45 minSchooling transitions	60 minutes walking/trot hack.	Rest Day	40 min schooling

To keep your horses fitness ride 3 - 4 times per week with the same type of intensity.

Stage 3	Week 7	45 minutesW/T/C	Day off	Introduce small gymnastics	45 minSchooling figures	60 min.W/T/C hack	Rest Day	Discipline specific
	Week 8	60 minutes	Day off	Discipline specific	45 min	60 min Lesson	Rest Day	Hacking
	Week 9	60 minutes	Day off	Prepare for competition	Discipline specific	Jumps & small course	Comp. Prep.	Competition



## EXERCISE #1

# Outline your program

Here you can record what you will do in your conditioning program.  
Print this out and write some ideas of what to include.

### 1. Exercises to Include in Section 1

Example - walking along driveway, 20 min. walking arena

### 2. Exercises to Include in Section 2

Example - set up gymnastic line

### 3. Exercises to Include in Section 3

Example - Prepare for competition



