

# Safekeeping: Stretching Legs

By Ruthann Smith  
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## Saddle Comforts

- In the barn, position the saddle well.
- Always pull the saddle pad or blanket up high into the pommel before pulling the girth safely snug. You want to keep the saddle from sliding while allowing the horse to relax.
- Right before mounting, tighten the girth just enough for safe riding.
- After the girth is pulled tight, carefully stretch each front leg forward.
- Later: dismount, run your stirrups up, loosen the noseband if desired, and loosen the girth so that it is comfortable, yet snug enough to be safe for the journey back to the barn.

*About the author: The lack of effective and healthy grooming products inspired Ruthann Smith, world-class groom and braider, to develop the economical Lucky Braids™ solutions: All-In-One Shampoo, Whitener/ Dry Wash enzymatic spray, Handy Salve and Braiding DVD/Tool prized by top horsemen. For more grooming tips, please join at: [LuckyBraids.com](http://LuckyBraids.com).*

Girths and cinches can pinch. This makes some horses bite when the girth is tightened. Stretching front legs allows a horse to work comfortably. But, it needs to be done carefully. A horse can very easily put an extended leg through the reins. When it does, you are in big trouble. He'll run backwards and someone will get hurt.

Stretching a horse's legs before mounting is routine for good grooms. It can even improve performance. If the horse feels good, he not only wants to play but he can also move freely. So, please consider stretching legs, but only and always with extreme caution.

The idea is to stretch the skin under the girth or cinch so it is not folded and pinching your horse. In the barn, position the saddle and pull the girth safely snug so the saddle does not slide. A saddle that slides under the belly can cause an accident.

Right before mounting, pull the girth tighter. Then, stretch the legs to ensure the horse's comfort.

You'll need both hands to perform the stretch. When you lower the horse's leg, you don't want to drop the reins. So, fold the reins and hold them between

two fingers in one hand. Support behind the horse's knee with that palm. The other hand supports the toe. Using two hands will also help you feel when each leg is extended far enough.

After your reins are organized, ask the horse to lift one front leg as if you were intending to pick his hoof. When he lifts the leg, move in front and to the side of the shoulder. Allow the horse time to redistribute his weight to balance. Then, gently and slowly support and extend each front leg forward, but not past the point of comfort. Don't



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**Caution: Pull the reins over the head. An arm through the reins hurts your shoulder if the horse pulls back and you can't keep hold. Fold the reins and hold them between the fingers of one hand. Cup that palm behind the knee. Support the toe with your other hand. Be sure the horse doesn't put his foot through anything!**



PHOTO: RUTHANN SMITH

**Always support the leg as you gently lower it, allowing the horse to balance. Remember: Take the reins forward over the horse's neck, use two hands and watch the horse does not put his foot through anything.**

## Heads Up:

- Organize your reins carefully. A foot through them can be catastrophic.
- Allow the horse time to balance before lifting and lowering his legs.
- Gently support the leg as you lift and lower it.

let the leg drop. When done properly, horses enjoy this stretch. If you let their leg slam down or yank too hard, they are not going to appreciate your efforts. Always support the leg.

Proper turnout requires tack fitting well. A horse that is dressed appropriately and moves easily can be a willing partner. Fashion follows

function. So, be sure your horse is comfortable to enjoy his big heart. ■