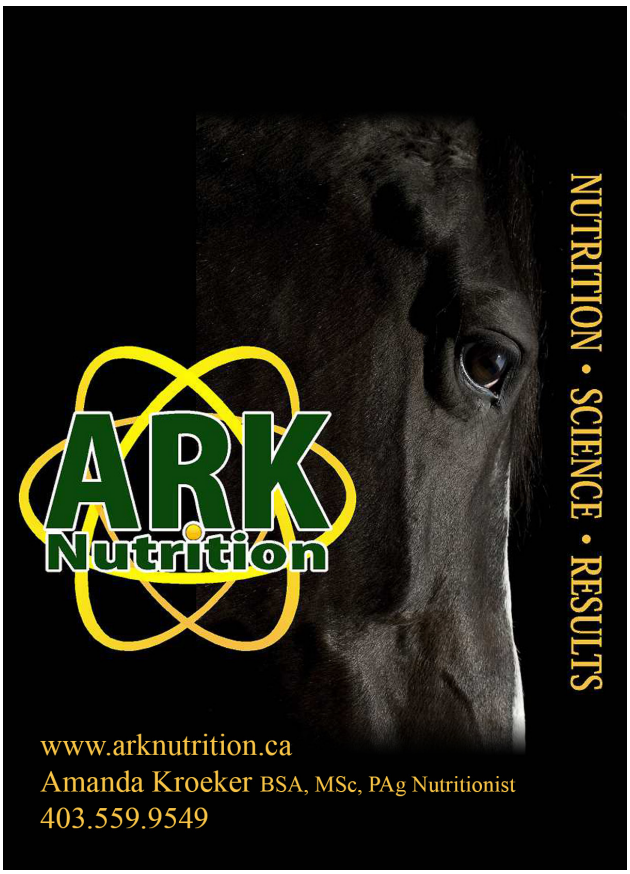
Is it me or my tack?

Sandra Sokoloski

Many riders come to see me because they are crooked and have sore hips or back. Asking them about their saddle and stirrups is part of my assessment. My number 1 question is when was the saddle last re-flocked? Many riders that consult with me have physical problems that lend themselves to sitting to one side. I ask them to check the panels to see if one side has been even a tiny bit squashed in the front or the back. If the panels of the saddle are at all uneven (due to their history of crookedness) the rider will end up sitting to one side no matter how hard they try to be straight. This leads to collapsing at the waist or leaning to the opposite side and creating excessive compression on the joints of the lower spine. Gripping with the thigh on the opposite side may also occur which can lead to knee pinching, overactive hip flexors or inner thigh strain. Gripping with the hip muscles on the same side often causes muscle ache and cramping.

Rider sitting with saddle tipped left causing right side tension and 'jamming' of left leg

I also ask about stirrups. Many riders started using the flexible stirrups thinking it would help with their leg/foot position. Nothing is further from the truth. Unless they have a structural abnormality in their leg or ankle, jumper riders that use the flexible stirrups will struggle more with their balance. The stirrup and the ball of the foot must act as a solid base so the calf can be an adaptable spring mechanism. Riders using these stirrups often lean to far up the neck at take off and/or fall back to soon/hard on landing. Their lower leg may swing more or they will brace it forward to compensate.

If you struggle with being crooked or stiff, have your movement assessed by someone that understands riding as well as tack variances and can offer suggestions that address the whole picture!