

# NEWS LETTER

VIRGINIA DRESSAGE ASSOCIATION CHARLOTTESVILLE CHAPTER

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Eleszabeth McNeel**

Happy New Year! As your newly elected President, I am looking forward to meeting everyone in the coming year! This is also the time of the year for those pesky New Year Resolutions. I try to keep mine reasonable and attainable. For example: Pet the dog more; Spend more time forest bathing; Plant then smell the roses; Spend more time just listening to your horse - eating, sleeping, breathing.

The Club has a busy year ahead - clinics, shows, Salsa dancing, educational sessions, and more. Details of these will be forthcoming in the next few months. If you would like to join in on planning these activities, please let any of the Board members know. Or if you have any ideas for clinics, educational sessions, etc., please contact one of us.

Wishing all a glorious and healthy year ahead!  
Eleszabeth E McNeel



## 2024 VADA CH Board

President: Eleszabeth McNeel  
Vice President: Erin Fitzwater  
Secretary: Shaleena Arreguin  
Treasurer: Bettina Longaker  
Awards: Shaleena Arreguin  
Membership: Sandy Worley  
Newsletter/Webmaster: Nancy Doody

### VADA State Representatives

Bettina Longaker  
Nancy Doody  
Eleszabeth McNeel

[VADA CH December Board Minutes](#)

[VADA State January Board Minutes](#)



## EVENTS

VADA CHARLOTTESVILLE FEBRUARY BOARD  
MEETING AND 2023 YEAR END AWARDS LUNCHEON  
18 FEBRUARY 2024

SNOW DATE: 25 FEBRUARY

MICHIE TAVERN

11:00 PM

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

BILL OF FARE - ADULT - \$24.95

VEGAN/VEGETARIAN - \$11.95

R.S.V.P .

SHALEENA ARREGUIN

[shaleena.nicole123@gmail.com](mailto:shaleena.nicole123@gmail.com)

VADA Chapter Event Calendar

Do You Have Something to Share with Members? An article? Have Ideas for Chapter Educational Events? Want To Hear From You!

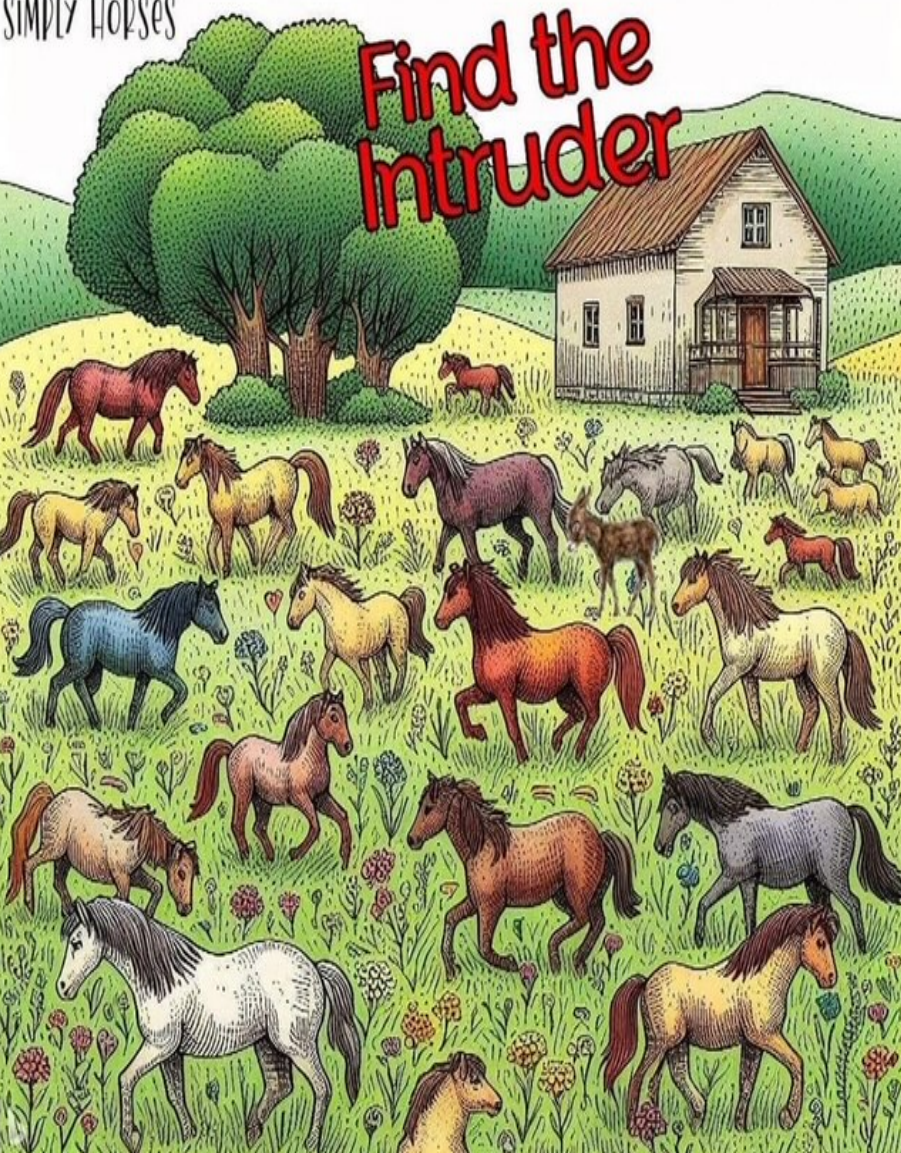
email Erin Fitzwater at [cgent76@gmail.com](mailto:cgent76@gmail.com)

## 2024 Chapter Membership (as of 1/17 Jan 24)

Bettinna Longaker  
Jeremey Fox  
Nancy Doody  
Beth Sproule  
Taska Parker  
Peta Wyllie  
Nancy Lowey  
Jeri Tate  
Nicky Vogel  
Roxanne Hagan  
Robin Dannels  
Lisa Macchi  
Susan Laurie  
Sandi Nelson  
Donna Martin  
Jillian Kirkpatrick  
Carol Bauer  
Wendy Owens  
Melyni Worth  
Sabine Desper  
Malinda Zielke  
Kim Aust  
Gardner (Gardy) Bloemers  
April Rivers  
Isabella Rice  
Molly Bull  
Nancy Olson  
Sarah Olson  
George Williams  
Roberta Williams  
Eleszabeth McNeel  
Erin Fitzwater  
Kathleen Gruss  
Michelle Anderson  
Celia Refalko  
Karen Rice  
Laura Berne  
Shaleena Arreguin  
Sandy Worley  
Anne Chapin  
Flavia Anger  
Halley Bell  
Helle Stewart  
Kim Schmidt  
Hannah Schmidt  
Melissa Wimmer  
Sophia Bryant  
Katherine Innes  
Darla Fainter  
Karen Fox  
Laurel Moore  
Hannah Parker  
Ellen Hudgins

SIMPLY HORSES

## Find the Intruder



# Four by Four

## 16 CAVALETTI EXERCISES FOUR PATTERNS USING FOUR POLES

Michele Wellman  
By Chance Farm LLC

### WHY CAVALETTI?

Using Cavaletti is a great way to improve horse and rider fitness and communication. Exercises, when used appropriately, can increase a horse's coordination, balance, and strength, improve stride length, regulate tempo and sharpen reaction time. For riders, cavaletti work can help timing of aids, increase focus, and improve understanding of consistent tempo and stride length. These are just a few of the benefits of consistent use of cavaletti in a training program

### MATERIALS...

For the four exercises in this article, you will need four 12-foot poles, a roll of brightly colored duct tape and a measuring tape. If you are lucky to have a few poles with stripes already painted on them, you won't need the duct tape. 10-foot poles or 8' landscape timbers are also reasonable options. Poles should be made of heavy weight materials.

### EXERCISE SET UP #1

See Figure 2 for basic set up details. If you have a ring that is only 20 meters (66 feet) wide, then you can place the end of your poles against your arena wall. In that case, your circles will be shifted a "slot", and you will have about a 13 meter circle right to the inside of your poles.

The 3 poles in set in sequence are intended as trot poles in this series of exercises. Most average horses can negotiate these poles easily when set at 4 ½ feet apart. If you have a shorter striding horse, you can set these poles to 4 feet apart. For longer striding horses, these poles can be set to 5 feet apart. This exercise is not intended to shorten or lengthen your horse's natural stride length so you'll want to set the exercise as best you can to what feels "easy" for your horse.

### MATERIALS... (continued)

For safety, I prefer wood poles/timbers over hollow plastic "PVC" poles because they don't move as easily when a horse taps them, and they won't shatter if a horse steps on them. What's the duct tape for? I like using striped poles as often as possible because the stripes give the rider a target. These exercises can help hone a riders accuracy which can improve both dressage test riding as well as jumping. As we all know, better accuracy increases safe jumping, but also gains you points in the dressage arena! If your poles don't have stripes, use the duct tape and measuring tape to mark your poles from the middle outward in 3 foot increments as shown in Figure 1. If you don't have a 12-foot pole, you can leave off the end tape. For the purposes of these exercises, I'll call those spaces between the duct tape "slots". We will also assume you are using 12' poles and that 1 meter is roughly 3.3 feet.

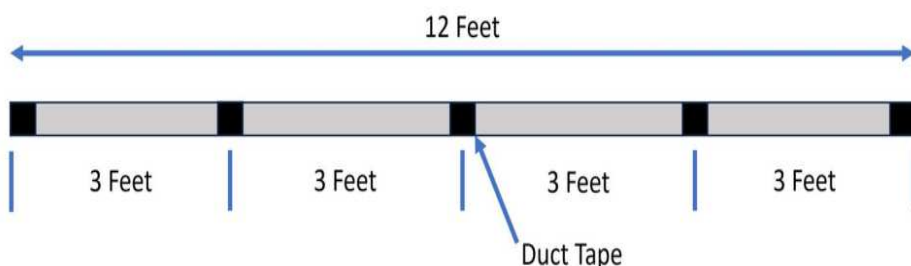


Figure 1: Marking your Poles

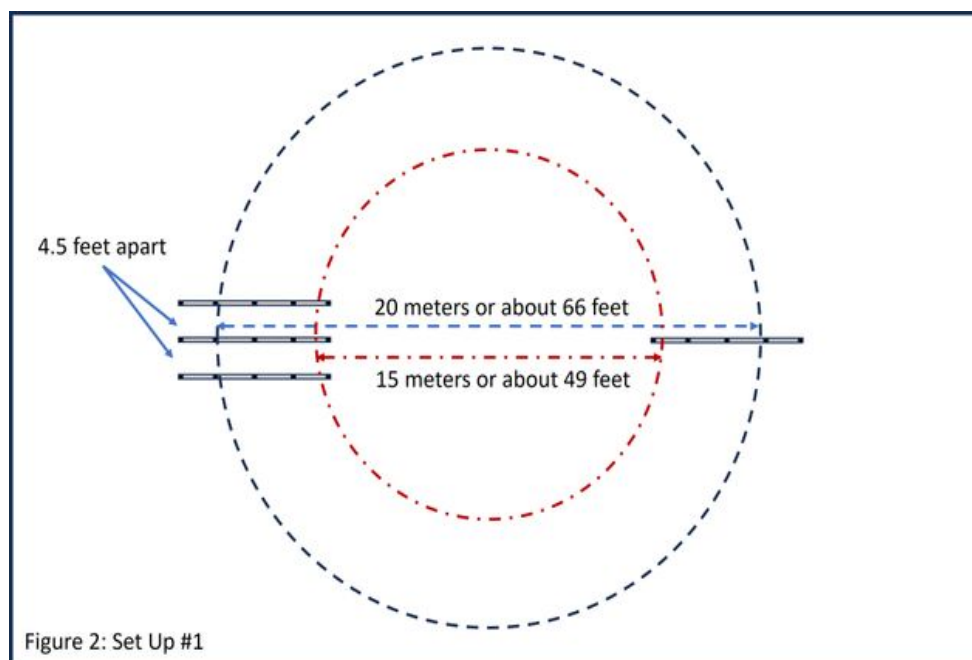


Figure 2: Set Up #1

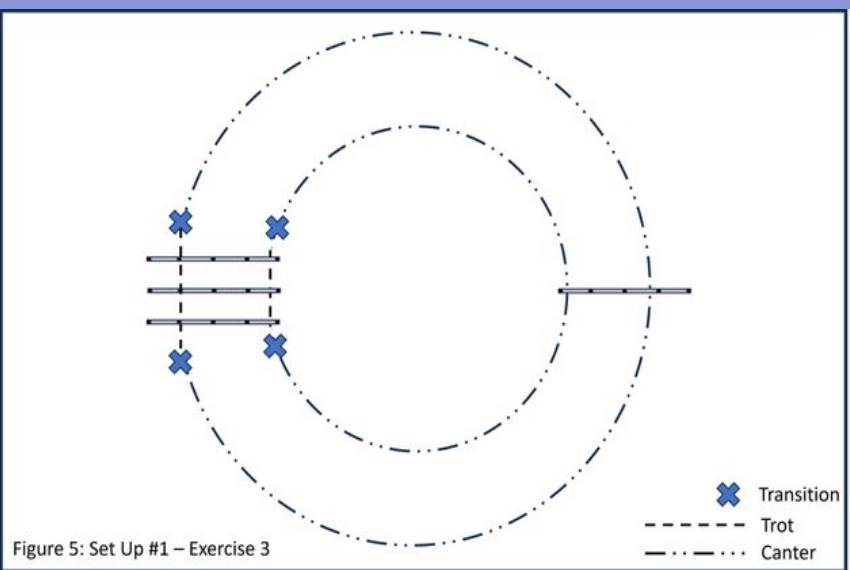
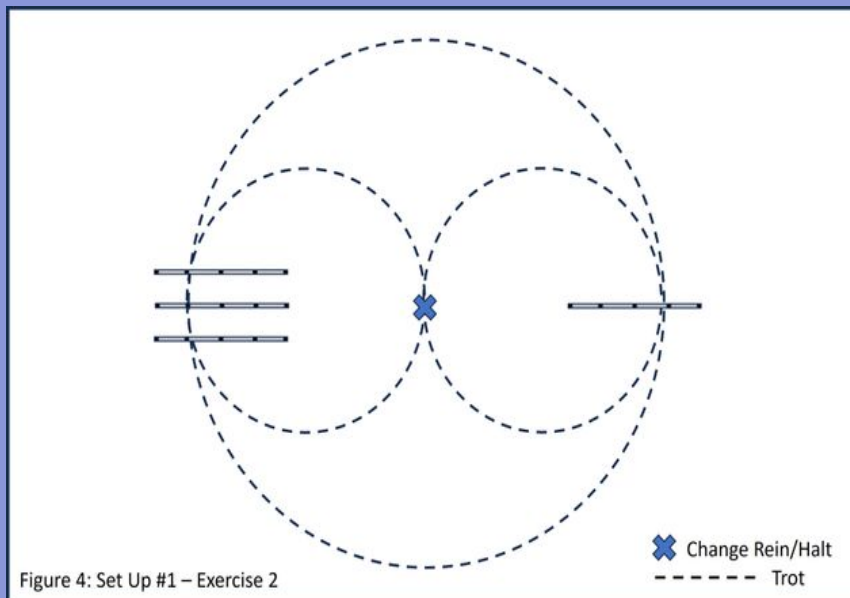
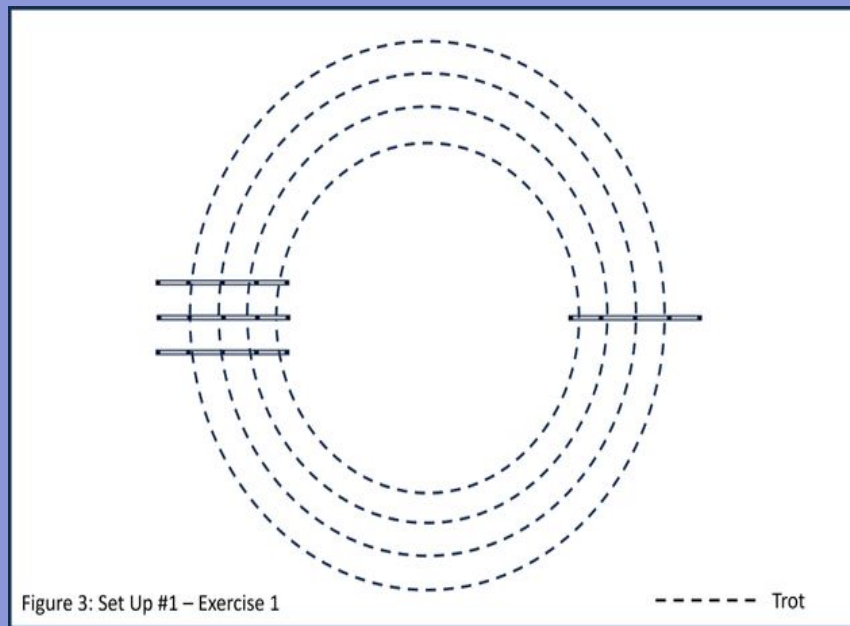
## EXERCISE 1, SET UP 1

Warm your horse up according to your normal routine. I encourage people to at least do a walk and trot warm up. If your horse usually trots better after cantering, then definitely canter before starting the exercise. If you set up your poles according to **Figure 2**, then your outermost circle shown in **Figure 3** will be approximately 20 meters. Pick up a trot tracking your easier direction and start a circle aiming for the first duct tape mark on that outer circle. Your goal is to ride a regular trot hitting that mark across all 3 trot poles and the single pole on the opposite side of the circle. You'll want to focus on maintaining a consistent tempo through the entire circle and enough bend to keep your horse nose to tail along the circle line. When that feels easy for you and your horse, start to spiral in one mark at a time. Spend enough time on each circle size to feel comfortable, balanced and regular before moving to the next smaller circle. Following the marks will move you from about a 20 meter circle to about a 15 meter circle. Only go as small as you can while maintaining balance and a consistent tempo.

Depending on you and your horse's fitness level and how long it takes for you to move down to the smallest circle, you can stop for a break, or progress back out one mark at a time to the largest circle. Once you have completed the first direction, give your horse a walk break and change to your harder direction. Proceed through the exercise the same way. This exercise is a great spin on the common spiral in and out exercise. Throughout, you should be thinking about your accuracy over the poles, consistent tempo and increased bend as the circles get smaller. This should help improve balance and ultimately the connection in the trot.

## EXERCISE 2, SET UP 1

This exercise is a great way to practice your centerline turns and changes of direction. If you have cones or something similar available, you can set up two cones on either side of the "X" in **Figure 4**. We will assume that you have warmed up as recommended in Exercise 1.



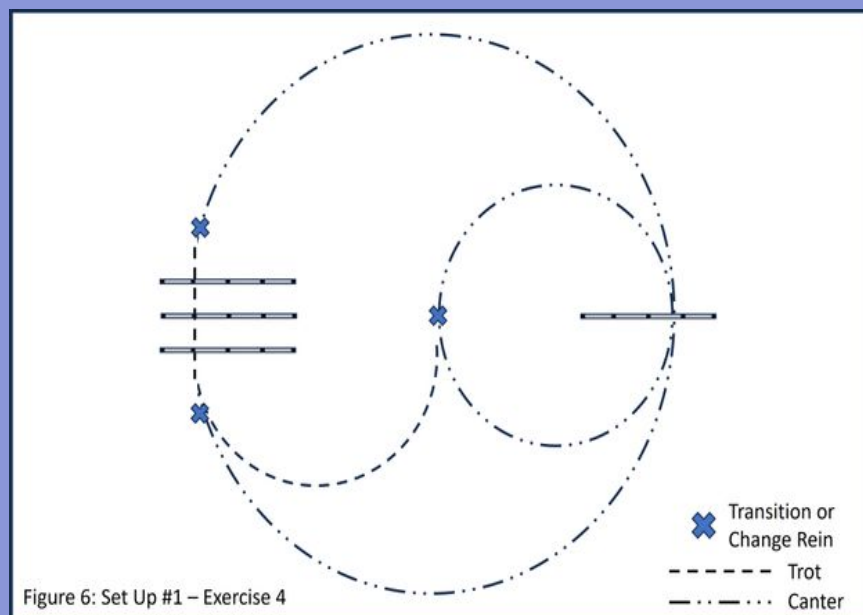
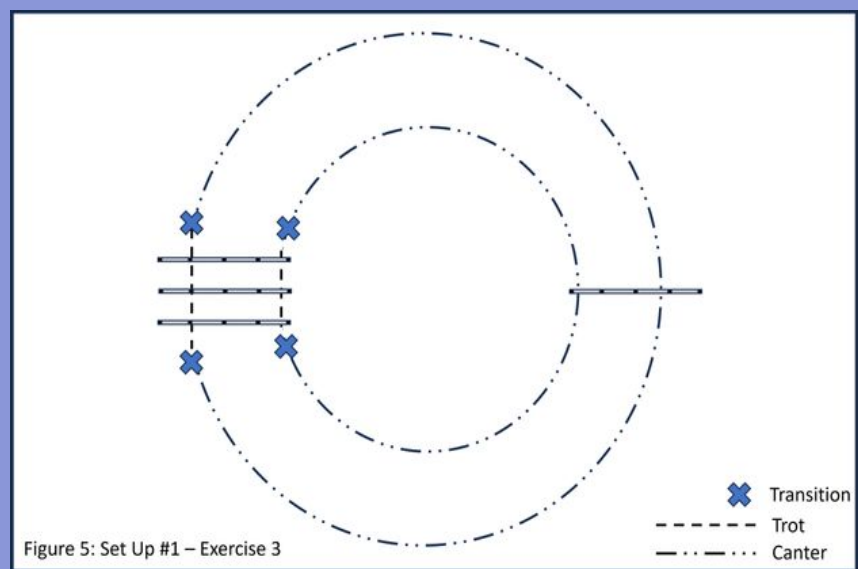
Start out trotting your 20 meter circle marks either direction. Once you have found the consistent tempo, balance and bend you felt in Exercise 1, start a half circle turn after crossing the single pole and pass through the cones while changing direction. Then, pass over outermost mark on the trot poles and continue on the 20 meter circle. Again, you are working to maintain consistency of tempo, balance and bend throughout the path. After crossing the single pole again, start a half circle and pass through the cones while changing direction. Continue this pattern until the half circles are easier and you can maintain your accuracy on the turns, over the poles and through the cones.

Once the trot pattern becomes easy, you can add a trot-walk-trot transition between the cones, working up to a trot-halt-trot transition. This exercise builds on the balance, bend and temp from **Exercise 1** by adding an additional accuracy component as well as improves your horse's response to the aids by requiring more forethought and preparation for the turns and transitions.

### EXERCISE 3, SET UP 1

The last two exercises focused on the trot and in this exercise, we will add canter. I stress this at my cavaletti clinics, but I will also stress it in this article. Trot poles are for trotting!!! Please do your very best to refrain from cantering over the trot poles. If you cannot get your downward transition from canter to trot, go around the trot poles.

Start out trotting your 20 meter circle marks in the direction of your easier canter lead. Once you find that great trot we've been working on, pick up a canter at the "X" after passing over the trot poles as shown in **Figure 5**. You'll canter over the single pole and downward transition to trot at the "X" before going over the trot poles. In the canter, your focus should be on the tempo, balance and bend, just like the trot exercise. If your horse is green to cantering poles, it's very important to focus on the quality of your canter and maintaining that quality throughout the circle. If your horse breaks to trot over the canter pole, make sure you come with a more forward-thinking leg aid as you approach the pole. Your job is to ride the best, most consistent canter you can and let your horse figure out how to negotiate the pole.



Your goal for this exercise is to make your trot to canter transition and canter to trot transition as close to the trot poles as you can. Only make them where you are comfortable and get closer as you feel like your horse becomes more on your aids. It is possible to make the transition one step after and one step before the trot poles! However, your goal at the beginning is to make the transitions as balanced and seamless as possible, ride the best quality canter you can manage and work on improving your tempo, bend and balance. When the 20 meter circle is easy each direction, you can move the circle down to the meter mark and work at that circle size. Regardless of how you feel about your success doing this exercise, make sure to do each lead evenly. And remember, you don't have to conquer this entire exercise in one session!

## EXERCISE 4, SET UP 1

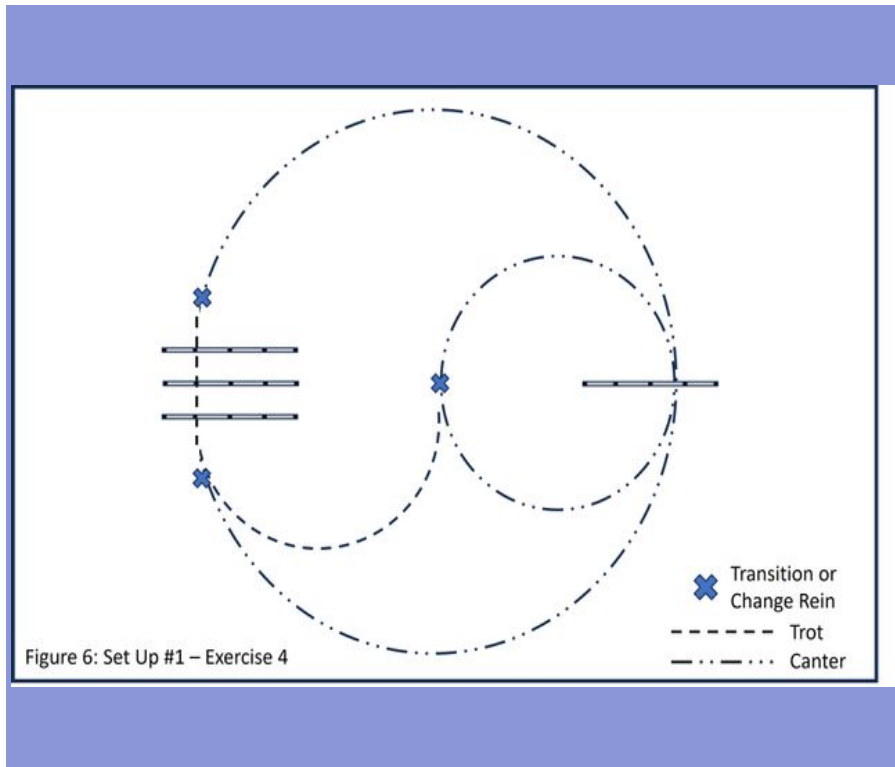
In this last exercise, we will combine the elements from Exercises 2 and 3. Depending on the level you are currently riding, you may only do pieces and parts as a challenge. More advanced riders can increase the difficulty. **Figure 6** shows one variation of the pattern which we'll go through in detail.

Start out trotting your 20 meter circle marks tracking left. As in Exercise 3, pick up a canter after passing over the poles and continue to the single pole over the 20 meter mark. After crossing the single pole, begin a 10 meter circle at canter, go through your cones, cross the single pole again and continue to the trot poles along the 20 meter circle. Perform your downward transition to trot, trot the poles and then an upward transition to canter. This time after crossing the single pole, you will do a 10 meter half circle and transition to trot between your cones and change direction. Trot the trot poles and pick up your right lead canter performing the same pattern.

There are MANY variations to this exercise and it is a test of all the things we've worked on in the simpler patterns. Use your imagination and have fun with different transitions and circle sizes; anything from canter-walk-canter and flying changes to 8 meter voltes. It really can be very versatile if you get creative!

Thank You MICHELE WELLMAN,  
author  
VADA/NOVA

Michele is a USDF Bronze and Silver Medalist and USEA ECP Level III certified eventing coach. She has competed multiple horses through Intermediate level dressage and Preliminary level eventing. Michele owns By Chance Farm where she teaches and trains, hosts cavaletti clinics monthly and holds 8 dressage schooling shows and 4 Licensed shows each year. Her goal is to make riding and showing a fun and accessible experience for all.



# Hay Dunking in Equines | Why Does My Horse Dunk His Hay?

Author: Melyni Worth  
Foxden Equine



## Hay Dunking in Equines | Why Does My Horse Dunk His Hay?

Hay dunking in horses is a habit that can turn slimy quickly, especially in warm weather. You may wonder why your horse eats a mouthful of hay and then dunks it into the water troughs. While some consider using a slow feeder or a hay net placed away from any area where the horse is dunking to reduce the mess, others ponder if this behavior is a sign of discomfort that warrants further investigation.

### What is Hay Dunking?

Hay dunking is a behavior exhibited by some horses where they take a mouthful of hay and then submerge it into a bucket of water or another water source before consuming it. This act of soaking the hay in water can be intriguing to horse owners and caretakers, often eliciting a range of opinions on whether it is a good or bad habit. At its core, hay dunking is a natural behavior that many equines engage in for various reasons, though the specific motivations can differ from horse to horse.

In the act of hay dunking, a horse usually picks up a wad of hay with its teeth, carries it over to the water bucket, and then deliberately dunks it into the water. The hay often becomes saturated quickly, and the horse then proceeds to eat the wet hay directly from the water or removes it to consume it separately. Some horses may even prefer to leave the hay submerged in the water for extended periods before finally eating it.

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Though hay dunking is not practiced by all horses, it is not an uncommon behavior. It's observed in various breeds, age groups, and both domesticated and wild horses. While some may do it only occasionally, others make it a regular part of their feeding routine. Horse owners might notice that it's not just hay that gets the dunking treatment—some horses also dunk their grain or other feedstuffs. However, hay is the most commonly dunked item, perhaps because of its fibrous nature and the ease with which it can be carried to a water source.







## Importance of Cleanliness for Equine Health

Maintaining a clean feed area is crucial for the overall health and well-being of your horse. The cleanliness of the water bucket and feed tub can significantly impact equine health, as a contaminated feeding environment can be a breeding ground for bacteria, mold, and parasites. This is especially true for horses that engage in hay dunking, as the act of submerging hay into water can introduce additional debris and possible contaminants into the water bucket.

Water buckets should be cleaned and disinfected regularly to ensure that they are free from algae, bacteria, and other potential hazards. In the case of hay dunkers, this may mean that water buckets need to be cleaned more frequently to remove hay particles and other detritus that may accumulate at the bottom. Fresh water should always be provided after cleaning to ensure your horse is drinking clean and safe water.

The feed tub also requires regular cleaning and sanitizing. Leftover feed can attract flies and other pests, and it can also become moldy if not cleaned out. Mold spores could cause respiratory issues or gastrointestinal upset, so it's best to remove any uneaten food promptly and wash the tub thoroughly. If you have a horse that enjoys dunking its hay, consider the implications for the feed tub as well. Saturated hay could leave more residues, requiring more frequent cleanings.

Hay dunkers add another layer of complexity to maintaining a clean feed area. Some owners choose to offer a separate water source specifically for dunking to keep the primary drinking water clean. Alternatively, if your horse is a frequent dunker, implementing a routine to check the water multiple times a day will be beneficial in keeping the area clean.

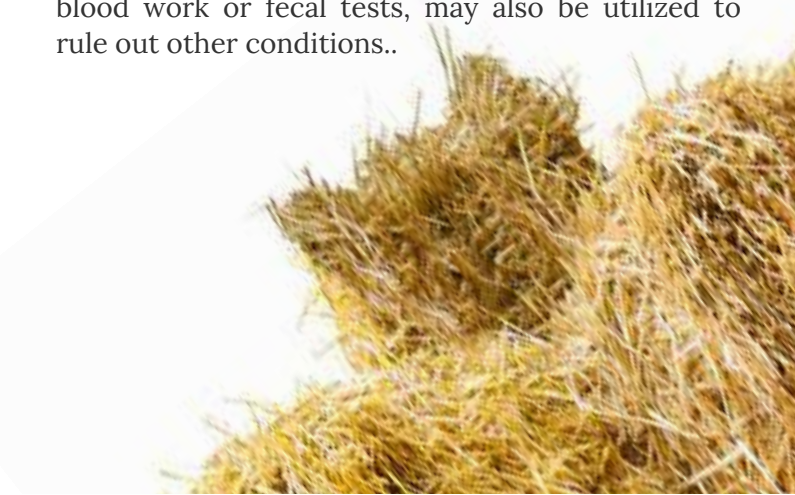
## Hay Dunking as a Sign of Ulcers

While hay dunking could be normal behavior for some horses, a sudden change in habits warrants further investigation.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this behavior could potentially be linked to ulcers in some cases. The theory is that soaking hay in water might make it easier to swallow and less irritating to a sensitive stomach lining, thus providing some relief from the discomfort associated with ulcers. Horse owners who notice a sudden onset of hay dunking behavior in a horse that did not previously engage in it might consider ulcers as a potential underlying issue.

Ulcers in horses, specifically equine gastric ulcer syndrome (EGUS), are a common yet concerning health issue. They occur when the stomach lining is damaged by stomach acid, often as a result of stress, frequent use of NSAIDs, or irregular feeding patterns that leave the stomach empty for long periods. Symptoms can range from subtle signs like mild discomfort, poor coat condition, and reduced performance to more overt indicators such as weight loss, colic, and behavioral changes.

Despite the intriguing connection between hay dunking and potential ulcers, it's important to note that there is no definitive scientific research backing this claim. Therefore, while hay dunking could serve as an observational clue, it is far from a diagnostic criterion. To properly diagnose ulcers, a veterinarian would typically perform an endoscopic examination to directly visualize the condition of the stomach lining. Other diagnostic tests, such as blood work or fecal tests, may also be utilized to rule out other conditions..





## Check Your Hay Dunker's Teeth

Some have speculated that hay dunking could be an indication of dental issues. The idea is that soaking the hay in water may make it softer and easier to chew, thereby alleviating any discomfort or difficulty the horse might experience due to dental problems. Horse owners who notice that a horse has suddenly started dunking hay when it didn't do so before might consider dental issues as a possible reason behind this new behavior. A comprehensive veterinary dental examination would be the best course of action to rule out or confirm dental issues.

Dental care is an integral aspect of equine health that can significantly impact a horse's overall well-being and performance. Dental problems in horses can manifest in various ways, from difficulty chewing and weight loss to behavioral changes and even systemic health issues. Common dental problems include sharp enamel points, hooks, wave mouth, and periodontal disease. Veterinarians often recommend regular dental check-ups, usually annually, to ensure that any dental problems are identified and addressed promptly.

Despite the theories surrounding hay dunking and dental issues, it's crucial to note that there is currently no scientific research to substantiate this claim. Therefore, while it might serve as an observational clue, it should not be used as a diagnostic tool for determining dental health. A proper diagnosis would require a thorough examination by a qualified equine veterinarian, who may use specialized tools to inspect the horse's mouth and teeth closely. This could include the use of a dental speculum to hold the mouth open, along with manual and visual examination techniques.

## Management Strategies for the Hay Dunker

While this may be a natural behavior for some horses, if your horse starts dunking his hay suddenly, it's crucial to consider reasons your horse may be doing so. Dunking habit is a serious issue that could indicate a medical problem like gastric ulcers, colic, or signs of dental or nasal irritation. Some believe that hay in water makes it easier for the horse to chew, particularly if the horse is suffering from any form of discomfort that warrants further investigation.

Equine health experts suggest that horses that dunk their hay may be trying to ferment the hay to make it easier to digest. However, there is no conclusive research to back these claims. If you find your horse's hay dunking habit concerning, ensure your horse always has a clean water source near the hay pile and contact your veterinarian for a comprehensive health check. You may also consider using a slow feeder or hay net to reduce the mess, as hay in their water buckets can turn slimy quickly, especially in warm conditions.

Remember, while some horses develop this habit, hay dunking may also arise from a sore throat, or other signs of discomfort. So, if this behavior started suddenly, it's important to rule out pain or any other underlying issues by seeking the advice of a veterinarian. To help you decide on the next steps for tackling tough-to-heal wounds, adding water to dry hay, or dealing with effects of longeing, a thorough veterinary assessment is indispensable. This ensures that you're not just treating symptoms but getting to the root of any issues affecting your horse's well-being.

Whether it's hay dunking horse behavior or other changes in equine nutrition and habits, always prioritize the health and comfort of your horse. Take note if your horse is dunking his hay in water while eating and whether he is moving away from any area where dry hay is present. Consulting with an equine nutritionist can provide further insights into how much hay your horse can grab a mouthful of, prior to feeding, and offer strategies to improve equine health overall. Remember, I provide consultations free of charge- just email me! Melyni Worth

**Author: Melyni Worth**  
Foxden Equine





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