

How Well Do You Know Your Brain?

In this article Debbie lays out some well known and lesser known facts about the workings of our brain, and provides some thoughts about what that means for horse riders!

Most people have at some point heard that we use only 10-20% of our brain's capacity. Did you also know that the brain uses 20% of your body's energy? And, it generates 25 watts of power while we're awake – enough to **illuminate a light bulb!**



No wonder our horses seem to be able to 'sense' our mood as we walk onto the yard. Imagine what else we emit by 'firing up our brains' when we add to that energy field strong emotions such as anger, nerves, fear, or depression!

Your brain is divided into two sides. The left side of your brain controls the right side of your body; and, the right side of your brain controls the left side of your body. Perhaps next time your horse favours one rein over the other – we should stop! Take stock of which rein it is and ask ourselves if that has anything to do with our brain dominance rather than being solely about our horse!

Did you ever hear that **a cooked potato can jump-start your brain** when you're feeling foggy? That lavender helps us sleep and the essential oil of jasmine can quickly restore mental alertness. Now, I'm not suggesting we ride our horses with a sprig of jasmine between our teeth (although it would make for a fun photo competition) - but there's definitely something to be said for getting into the right emotional and mental 'state' before we mount.

Unconsciousness will occur after 8-10 seconds after loss of blood supply to the brain. Yet how many times do we notice ourselves holding our breath while we ride or physically tensing parts of our body (neck, shoulders, back). Imagine the strain we put



on our whole system as we ride if we don't allow the blood to flow freely! The truth for many of us is that while schooling or competing we can get that feeling of a sudden rush to our heads when we dismount, or aches and pains in tense muscles while in the saddle. Why? Often we ride dehydrated: we simply don't drink enough water to help the brain function. Or, we ride in a

'set position' bracing an arm, collapsing to one side or clamping our legs around our horse's side. Both aspects negatively impact the bodies' ability to do what it does naturally and let the blood flow! So while I'm not advocating 'wriggling around' in the saddle – I do recommend injecting lots of variety into your schooling to use different body parts and prevent you riding robotically!

Your brain **uses approximately 20% of the total oxygen** pumping around your body! This is why sports coaches place so much emphasis on breathing (to supply the brain with oxygen). When riding our horses it is especially important to 'keep thinking' and avoid those trance like moments where we stop riding and become passengers - at least until he spooks and our tummies shoot into our throats!

How can you 'put these pieces together' to help your brain be your best friend?



Equilates (pilates for horse riders) helps to restore the body's natural balance and posture while riding to keep muscles and limbs moving freely and evenly. Sport Psychology helps you to consciously think about your breathing and teach you ways to use and engage your brain in a way that keeps riding fun, progressive and pleasurable!

To find out more contact us at info@jigsawequine.com

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