**30 minute Warm-up/Cool-down regime**

Be smart. Go easy. Start slowly.

Remember “loosen, warm, supple, cool”

**Walk to loosen**. Easy walking is the part of a warm-up many experts stress the most. Put your horse on a loose rein and in as relaxed a frame as possible to loosen him up. Take the long way to the arena – walking around the paddock or work in extra-large circles in the arena to reduce stress on joints and tendons/ligaments. Allow a good 5 to 10 minutes at this easy walk, more if your horse is older and/or especially stiff. *Like aging human athletes, older horses need extra time to get the blood flowing and the muscles/tendons ready to work*.

**Trot to warm**. After that critical walking period, ease into a trot to get your horse’s blood flowing and heart rate up. This begins the actual warming up of your horse’s muscular-skeletal system. Continue to use your whole arena and large circles as you work for a few minutes at a trot, then advance to a forward-moving lope.

**Bend to supple**. When you can feel your horse settling in and warming to his work at the trot and lope, begin some bending to further stretch and supple his muscles. Make your circles smaller, and add serpentines, figure-8s, or other exercises to the mix. Be sure to work equally in both directions, so you supple both sides equally. After a few minutes of bending, your horse should be ready, mind and body, to focus on whatever you want to work on in earnest.

**Cool to recover.** Ensure you finish with an easy walk to reduce lactic acid build up in his muscles. Recovery via an easy walk also allows his heart rate and breathing to slowly return to normal while he cools down. Cooling down properly ensures ligaments and muscles relax slowly, assisting in the prevention of injury. Always hose down his legs and saddle areas (including the girth path) to assist with relaxation and sweat (salt) removal.

Short on time? Just warm up and cool down. On days when you don’t have a lot of time use the warm-up/cool-down as your saddle time that day. You’ll keep your horse tuned up and avoid the risk of injury—so you can ride again tomorrow.