Equine Chiropractic Article
by Bonnie Spitzig
http://www.ontarioequine.net/EquineChiropracticArticle.html

Remember: The horse cannot give you what it does not have when subluxations exist:
complete and full motion.

Equine chiropractic deals with subluxations (partial dislocation) of the vertebrae, which often cause the pinching of nerves, leading to health problems for our horse. It takes very little to cause subluxations in the horse and it is often over looked as a cause of lameness, health problem, or performance problem. Many a horse has been saved by equine chiropractic care alone, so don't rule out this valuable treatment for your horse.

The forever question is how to know if your horse actually needs a chiropractic care. The answer is often very simple and you can start by answering these questions:

1) Does my horse hold weight well?
2) Does my horse have balance muscle tone on front and hindquarters?
3) Is my horse performing to its genetic capability?
4) Is my horse's behavior normal for my horse?
5) Has my horse's attitude changed?
6) Is my horse traveling straight with no interference problems?
7) If another treatment is being uses, is it working?
8) Is my horse experiencing injury symptoms or actual injuries that seem to appear our of nowhere?
9) Was my horse involved in an accident or incident?
10) Is my horse involved in sport competition?

These are just some of the questions to ask yourself to help determine if your horse may have a chiropractic problem.
We'll look at each one in turn:

1) Does my horse hold weight well?

Horses that cannot seem to gain weight, or are losing weight, can have other diet or injury problems which can often be ruled out with simple tests done by your veterinarian. However, when all testing falls within normal ranges, one is often confused on their horses condition. Subluxation can cause extreme pain for the horse and as such the horse often loses weight, fails to eat well and performs poorly. The pain threshold of every horse is different so the outward signs may not be noticeable by the inexperienced.

2) Does my horse have balanced muscle tone on front and hindquarters?

This is the best sign to tell if your horse really need chiropractic help. The hindquarters are often smaller in muscle tone than the front due to the subluxation of the acroiliac (ilium/sacrum) joint. Often seen in every discipline and breed type, subluxations can worsen over time or occur during a one time incident. Failure to build muscle tone indicates that the nerves and circulation are being impeded to that site, which means subluxations exist. Poor muscle tone means less oxygen carrying capacity, faster fatigue, stumbles, poor performance, tying-up, poor recovery, pain and the list goes on.
3) Is my horse performing to it's genetic capability?

Horses that do not meet their genetic capability are often subluxated. This can mean it breaks down early in it's career, never even reaches competition, struggles in training, trains poorly and disappoints owner and trainer. The horse looks good but can't seem to go any faster and even close to its genetic speed. The horse plateau's and no matter what you treat, do or change, the horse won't go on. **Subluxations cause motion restrictions and thus speed reduction.** The horse simply cannot give you speed when you do not allow full and complete joint motion. It could if the subluxations did not exist, however, to correct that you need chiropractic care. Other treatments will not correct the subluxation. Jumping horses can experience performance decline, refusals and other performing problems just from subluxation of the atlas and axis (the neck bones). The horse may jump well the first time around then cause faults in the next few rounds. This can be caused by the sacroiliac (and others) subluxation that cause the horse to fatigue the more it's asked to perform. Correcting the subluxations can often mean a better and faster performing horse.

4) Is my horse's behavior normal for my horse?

Some horses roll more than others, some have an attitude problem (more like training problems), some kick and others just have unique personalities. The question is whether you horse is behaving like themselves? Is your horse pinning its ears back more? Is it bucking? Does it resent raising its head? Is it rearing, hard to handle, or changing its behavior? Horses always have a reason why they do something and their behavior is not exception. Pain, just as with humans, often cause changes in behavior. Slight subluxations cause slight symptoms and major subluxations cause major symptoms.

5) Has my horse's attitude changed?

Performance horses often experience performance stress. This can lead to performance decline, sourness or depression. A horse that was once happy performing is now just going through the motions. This is often the horse that owner/trainer has treated with other means of therapy to no avail. Pain of the subluxations is again often the cause and if you can fix the cause the horse can return to normal attitude and vigor.

6) Is my horse traveling straight with no interference problems?

Horses that have interference problems are telling you they have motion problems, which means the joints are being affected. Subluxations can cause abnormal motion patterns as the joint can only follow through in the limited motion it is allowed. The motion abnormality can be subtle or quite obvious, with some even showing as lameness. Changing the shoeing or using other treatments is only a band aid solution, the subluxations will still exist and cause problems or future injury. Find the subluxations, fix them and allow the horse to travel straight. Even poor confirmation horses handle competition stress better with consistent chiropractic care.

7) If another treatment is being used, is it working?

Back pain and muscle soreness follow performance horses everywhere. The question is, of the current treatment you are using is not resolving the problem, why do you continue to use it? Most often its is because you believe that it is the only thing you can do for the horse to relieve pain and keep it performing. Good therapy begins with finding the actual cause that leads to back pain and muscle soreness in the horse. **Subluxations of the back (lumbar, sacroiliac (ilium/sacrum)), is the most common cause of back pain and muscle soreness in every horse discipline.** Since the hind is responsible for propulsion, subluxations in the above mentioned areas often lead to numerous performance problems.
8) Is my horse experiencing injury symptoms or actual injuries that seem to come out of nowhere?

A good example of this is a splint injury. One has to inject the area every 4-6 weeks to give the horse relief and/or avoid lameness in that leg. This is what I call a "ghost" injury. No matter what you do, how you treat it, or rest the horse, it keeps coming back to haunt the horse. These types of injuries are often caused by another problem and treating only the symptoms of pain is a band aid. As soon as the band aid falls off, the injury comes back. The actual cause to the splint problem can be other subluxations (pastern, fetlock, knee and/or hind subluxation). Hind subluxations cause the opposite front leg to compensate and thus the horse has to "pull" themselves forward, causing the ligament to tear between the splint and cannon bone, causing pain. The area may swell, or be painful upon palpation and a blind splint is assumed, injected and the horse sounds up. The injecting does its job of reducing pain, inflammation and the horse feels better and again looks sound. However, the ligament is still getting torn every time the horse performs, so when the injection wears off, the pain comes back. Find the subluxations, correct them, treat the splint accordingly, and the splint problem should resolve. Bowed tendons are also another prime example of hind subluxation.

9) Was my horse involved in an accident or incident?

We've all seen the type, the horse was performing fine, got involved in an accident and then was never the same again. The horse is the same, unfortunately, its skeletal system is not. Subluxations do not require speed to occur and can happen even under the smallest or minor conditions. Unfortunately, when we add in speed, an unforgiving surface and other landing factors, the horse's skeletal system is just not designed to handle such damage. Slips in the field, bringing their hind too far underneath when they stop for the fence, or going through it, all cause some type of subluxation to occur. This is often the horse that was training fine but now has totally changed attitude, behavior and is not offering a good performance. This can also be the horse that is showing signs of on-coming injury that is unexplained otherwise.

10) Is my horse involved in sport competition?

The stress on the joints of starting and stopping quickly, turns during speed, jumping/landing, accidents, rider control and other competition factors all can cause subluxations to occur in the horse. Even getting into that saddle causes tugs on the spine, in the same direction, as you always mount from the same side. Saddle horses can easily turn into bucking problems for this reason alone. Image what happens when we add harness, bike, driver and obstacles and speed to such forces.

One article cannot possibly go into all the things you could look for when determining if your horse may benefit from chiropractic care. That's why, as a Standardbred Trainer/Owner, I have written a book on this subject. It's from a trainer's point of view and most of all, written in layman's terms. It's easy to understand, has examples, pictures and loaded with information you can use.