

out of the saddle and the pressure on the horse's back decreased.

The bottom line is that many riders have knee pain due to bracing against the stirrup. Using hinged stirrups alleviates the symptoms but does not resolve the cause or prevent further knee damage. The hip, knee, and ankle, when working correctly within the confines created by the stirrup length, do not put pressure on the knees. I prefer to see my students learn how to

use their joints correctly to avoid damage, stabilize their leg, and eliminate the damaging downward force on the horse's back created by an artificial side-hinge.

EXERCISE

On the Horse

1. Review Fixes 4, 12, and 14 to be sure you are not stiffening your knees or bracing against your stirrups.

Correctly Sized Stirrups

It is very important to ride in a correctly sized stirrup (fig. 39.3). Riding in a stirrup that is too narrow is dangerous because your foot could get stuck (see fig. 17.1 A). Too wide, and your foot could slide through it easily. The tread should be one inch wider than your boot so that you have one-half inch on either side when your foot rests in the middle. You need to get another pair of stirrups for the winter if your warm boots are wider so that you still have room on either side of your boot. Far too often, I see heavy winter boots crammed into a too narrow stirrup. Given that horses are often more fresh in the winter, this is not a good combination!

Fig. 39.3 A correctly sized stirrup for this summer boot. Compare with figs. 17.1 A–C, where there is hardly enough room for the foot even without a boot!



2. Do the following experiment. Ride 15 minutes in the hinged stirrups you typically use. Stop and change to a rigid pair. Ride for another 15 minutes and then switch back. What is the difference between the two sets of irons? Does your horse go differently? Once you have done this experiment, choose what is best for you and your horse.

3. Outfit two pairs of leathers, one with rigid stirrups and the other with hinged. Some of my students are fine with rigid stirrups in the ring but not when out fox hunting all day, or trail riding. In these circumstances, I suggest they keep two sets of leathers, one with rigid and another with hinged stirrups, so they can swap out the leathers when foxhunting and ride with rigid stirrups in the arena.