



Common riding injuries

Safe in the saddle

A beautiful sport and great exercise for the whole body, horseback riding is also fairly dangerous. In 2009, some 78,500 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms for horseback riding-related injuries. About 15 percent of injuries are the result of non-riding activities, like shoeing and grooming.

Most horseback riding injuries occur when a rider falls. Collar bone fractures, along with bruises, sprains and strains, are common. Riders are also susceptible to broken wrists, shoulders and elbows. The most serious riding injuries involve the head and spine.

Whether you ride competitively or for recreation, there are many ways to stay safe in the saddle. By taking precautions, using proper technique and wearing the right equipment, riders can stay safe and enjoy the benefits of horseback riding for a lifetime.



Player Safety

Common accidents, serious injuries

Collarbone Fractured clavicles may occur when riders fall from a horse.

Arms Falling riders often try to break the fall with their outstretched arms. Sprains and fractures may occur.

Head Concussions and skull fractures may occur when a rider is thrown from a horse or falls while jumping or hurdling in an equestrian event. A kick to the head while grooming may also cause serious injury. Helmets may provide some protection.

Neck When a rider is thrown over the head of the horse, serious neck injuries may result. About 50 percent of riders also sustain head injuries when this happens.



Spine

When a rider falls or is thrown from a horse and lands on their feet or buttocks, serious spine injuries may occur. Fractures of the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae are most common.

Overuse injuries

Riding too much may cause sprains, strains and soreness in the shoulders, lower back and legs. Poor riding technique or inadequate conditioning may also contribute to overuse injuries.

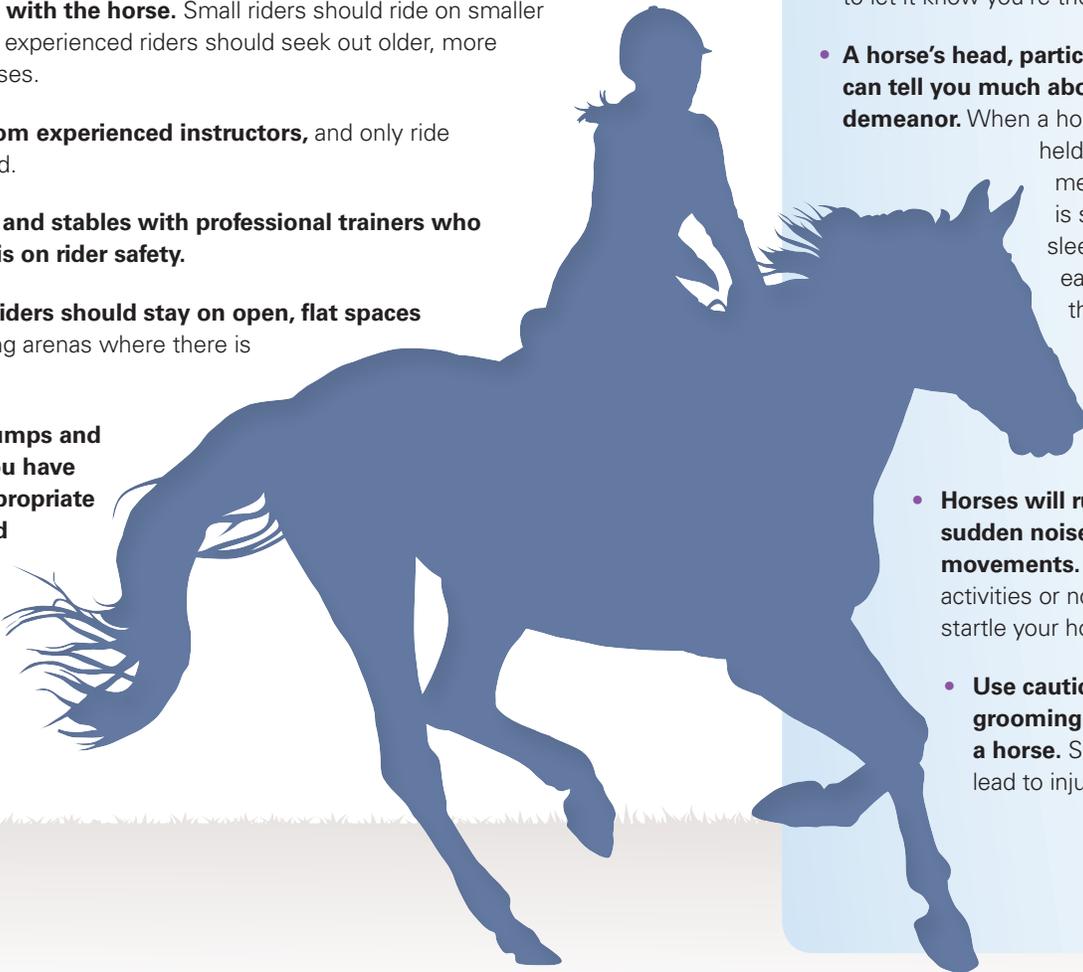
How can you prevent riding injuries?

Wear the right equipment

- **Helmets** that meet proper safety standards may reduce the risk of injuries from falls.
- **Sturdy leather boots with short heels** may provide stability. "Tack" boots, featuring steel or reinforced toes, also provide protection.
- **Use saddles and stirrups that are appropriate for your size.** Adjust saddles and stirrups for comfort and stability.
- **Young riders and those just starting out may consider using safety stirrups,** which break away if a rider falls off the horse, preventing the rider from being dragged.
- **Before riding, inspect all equipment for damage.**

Novice riders

- **Match the rider with the horse.** Small riders should ride on smaller horses, and less experienced riders should seek out older, more experienced horses.
- **Take lessons from experienced instructors,** and only ride when supervised.
- **Seek out barns and stables with professional trainers who put an emphasis on rider safety.**
- **Inexperienced riders should stay on open, flat spaces** or in special riding arenas where there is supervision.
- **Only attempt jumps and stunts when you have reached the appropriate level of skill and experience.**
No matter what your skill level, only try jumps and stunts with supervision.



Horse Sense

The relationship between a rider and a horse can be unpredictable. Horses don't always react to sounds, smells and movements the same way you do. And, while horses are intelligent animals that respond well to training, riders should always use caution when riding or grooming a horse.

Here are some tips for working with your horse:

- **Approach a horse at the shoulder, which is less threatening.** Never approach a horse from behind. When walking behind a horse, touch its rump to let it know you're there.
- **A horse's head, particularly its ears, can tell you much about the animal's demeanor.** When a horse's ears are held to the side, it may mean that the horse is sick, sedated or sleeping. Pinned back ears can mean that the horse is angry or threatened.
- **Horses will run away from sudden noises and movements.** Be aware of activities or noises that may startle your horse.
- **Use caution when grooming or shoeing a horse.** Sudden kicks often lead to injuries.



Reviewed by **Mininder S. Kocher, MD, MPH**
Boston Children's Hospital

This piece is part of an informational series on sports injury prevention produced by the Orthopedic Center/Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital. For materials on preventing injuries in other sports, call 617-355-3501 or visit bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed.



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