

Horse Riding Safety by Teresa Hughes

Horse riding can be a safe and extremely rewarding hobby when the rider takes steps to minimize risks. As with any of the most enjoyable activities in life, it is impossible to eliminate all risks. But, by educating yourself to equestrian safety, the possibility of injury can be greatly reduced.

Match Horse to Rider Ability - Throughout our riding careers our skills are constantly improving. Novice riders need to stick with calmer, more experienced horses until the necessary riding skills are achieved. If you wonder that you may be “over mounted,” you probably are. Consult with a riding instructor BEFORE purchasing a horse. She/he will help you find a horse that is matched to your current skill level.

Professional Instruction - Inexperienced riders should get lessons from a professional. Riding lessons can be somewhat expensive, but well worth it for increased riding safety. You can reduce the cost by finding a lesson partner(s) on your own skill level. Many instructors offer reduced rates for groups of two or more students.

Always Wear A Helmet - Always wear a properly fitted [ASTM/SEI certified](#) equestrian riding helmet. Equestrian helmets are different than bicycle helmets, as they are designed for impact to the back of the head, as opposed to front or side injuries which bicycle helmets are designed for. The majority of head injuries from horse riding accidents are to the back of the head.

Check Your Tack Regularly - Make it a habit to give your tack a thorough safety check every few weeks. Look for worn leather and fabric and rust and pay particular attention to fasteners, such as Chicago screws. This is also a good time to recheck that the bit is fitting properly. There should be no space between the bit and the corner of the mouth and no more than two creases in the corner of the mouth. Bit fit can change as leather expands and contracts over time.

Stirrup Safety - Wear a boot with a good heel to keep your foot from slipping through the stirrups. Not being able to get your foot free during a mishap is a terrifying experience and can result in the rider being dragged. As an additional precaution, you can prevent dragging accidents by using a safety stirrup, such as peacock stirrups, break away stirrups or Toe Stoppers. Toe Stoppers are a stirrup attachment that prevent the foot from slipping through that can be fitted to any stirrup style.

Stay Alert - It's easy when you're plodding along, chatting to your riding buddies on a beautiful day on the trail to forget you're supposed to be actively” riding” your horse. It's easy to allow yourself to become a bit of a back seat passenger. This can be very dangerous as your reaction time will be delayed by critical seconds. Stay alert and attentive at all times while riding. Not tense - but constantly aware of the environment - your riding surface, your peripheral vision, your distance in relationship to other riders, your seat and leg position, your horses responses to your cues -- much as you would (or should be) while driving a car.

Never Attach Anything Connected to Your Horse to Your Own Body - Not even for a very short period. This includes simply wrapping reins or leadrope around your arm or hand. Even though not tied, if the horse should bolt, the rope will be pulled even tighter. People get into the habit of doing this

tied, if the horse should bolt, the rope will be pulled even tighter. People get into the habit of doing this with dog leashes but this is a definite no no with horses.

Trail Riding Safety - By following a few safety and etiquette rules, trail riding can be a safe and fun way to see our beautiful country.

Never ride alone. Ride with someone you know to be experienced and thoughtful and don't allow others to pressure you into trying things you're not ready for.

Take your cell phone.

Wait until all riders are mounted to move off.

If you could be returning after dark, wear reflective clothing and take a small flash light.

Horses prone to kicking should wear a red ribbon on their tails.

Keep at least one horse length between you and the horse in front.

In larger groups, elect someone who knows the trails as trail boss. The trail boss knows the trails, maintains the pace and is considerate of others when increasing speed.

Do not pass the trail boss.

When riding during hunting season, make lots of noise and wear visible clothing such as a fluorescent vest. Using rhythm beads on your horse is a good way to alert hunters that you are NOT a deer.

A pen knife and baling twine can be very useful for emergency tack repairs.

Take a hoof pick.

Do not leave the trail. Holes and unsafe surfaces, sharp objects and hornets nests may exist in unknown areas such as open fields.

Practicing safe riding principles can mean many years of happy, healthy riding enjoyment for you and your horse.

Have fun and stay safe!

Teresa Hughes has over 20 years experience as an equestrian and trains her own horses. She's loved horses from her earliest childhood memories and begged her parents until she finally got her first pony when she was twelve. After several years of

being away from horses to raise a family, she was horrified to discover (although all the passion was still there) the confidence she'd enjoyed in her younger years was gone. After much trial and error, she has found her way back to enjoying her horses again as she did as a child and is not only riding, but starting colts as well. She shares on her website, Positively Riding!, the methods that were beneficial for her in overcoming fear. She hopes to help others, experiencing lack of confidence issues, to find a shorter path back to enjoying their horses.

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