



HORSEBACK RIDING

Based on the presentation "Recreational and Competitive Horseback Riding Opportunities" by Lauren McDevitt

Getting Started

Horseback riding can be therapeutic, recreational, competitive, or just a means to access the great outdoors. A horse can provide a great sense of freedom and independence for people with many different kinds of disabilities. Where you start depends on your goals. Consider the following ideas for getting started:

- ? Do you want to ride for fun, competition, or for the therapeutic benefits? Also consider the different riding disciplines such as English or Western, etc.
- ? Therapeutic riding programs can be good places to begin learning the skills and techniques required to ride as independently as possible. For the most part, programs provide safe, well trained horses, and have experience working with individuals with different types of disabilities. Contact NARHA (see Resources) for a listing of affiliated programs in your area.
- ? Safety is the most important consideration when riding. It is important to wear a helmet. Consider your abilities and take safety precautions when riding a horse you don't know.

Benefits of Riding

Improves balance
Improves coordination
Increases flexibility
Increases range of motion
Improves spatial abilities
Increases self confidence
Relieves stress
Socialization opportunities
Sense of freedom
Improves risk-taking abilities
Decreases spasticity
Improves strength

Adaptation Ideas

Mobility Impairments

In most cases a mounting ramp is a necessary adaptation. The horse stands beside a platform with a ramp and the rider mounts the horse from on top of the platform instead of from the ground.

Adaptations to the saddle and other equipment may be necessary for paralyzed or weak limbs or poor balance. A deep-seated saddle or a saddle with something to grip such as a western saddle, may be necessary for someone with poor balance. Special grips can also be added to reins individual with weak hand strength. If balance support is a need, assistants may be needed to walk beside a rider to provide support or to assure safety.

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Visual Impairments

Assistance guiding the horse may be necessary depending upon sight limitations. If the rider has some sight, tall white fencing may help create visual boundaries. If the rider has little or no sight, assistance may be needed to vocalize instructions for maneuvering the horse. A consistent and enclosed environment is often best for a rider with visual impairments.

Cognitive Impairments

Riders with a cognitive impairment may need differing levels of supervision depending upon their understanding of safety issues when around horses. When riding, instruction methods may need to be adapted to include simple language and repetition. A routine and structured environment is often helpful.

Helpful Hints to Increase Success

Hint #1: Riding is meant to be fun. Make sure you clearly communicate your goals.

Hint #2: It may take some time to find the right “match” when looking for a place to ride.

Hint #3: Be creative when making adaptations. Find ways to safely increase your independence while riding and caring for horses.

Hint #4: Consider how different types of horses and riding disciplines may increase your independence and enjoyment.

Resources

**North American Riding for the
Handicapped Association (NARHA)**
P.O. Box 33150
Denver, CO 80233
800-369-RIDE
www.narha.org

**American Competition Opportunities for
Riders with Disabilities (ACORD)**
Judy Serie nagy
408-263-3143
danivar@aol.com
<http://members.aol.com/ACORDCOMP>

Freedom Rider Catalog (Adaptive equipment)
www.freedomrider.com
781-320-9958