

Are you starting to ride?



A British Horse Society Information leaflet

The British Horse Society
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Explaining 'rider fitness'

The essentials necessary for the beginner rider

What the beginner should expect from the chosen Riding School

Rider Fitness

- What is 'rider fitness'?
- Why do you need to be 'rider fit'?
- How do you become fitter?

Horse riding, like any sport, demands a certain level of fitness. This fitness is different from other types of fitness, just as a sprinter has a different fitness from a weight lifter.

Basic equipment for Beginner Riders

- What clothes do you need to start riding?
- Do you need any other equipment?

It is expensive to buy the whole equipment, but there are essentials which you will need to be safe and comfortable for the first few lessons when you start riding.

What a Beginner Rider should expect from a Riding School

- What facilities should be available to a beginner rider in a Riding School?
- What standard of expertise should you look for?
- Are there any professional standards for Riding Schools?
- How will children riders react to this different type of instruction?

Choosing a riding school is important for those first lessons. As a beginner rider, you need to feel safe and secure. You also need to know that there is a basic standard to which Riding Schools have to conform.

Watch for the BHS Approved School Sign

http://www.bhs.org.uk/Riding_Schools/bhs_approvals.htm

This free leaflet explains about these topics.

Please take one

Rider Fitness

What is 'rider fitness'?

Rider fitness is a special type of fitness, a combination of suppleness, stamina, muscle strength and flexibility. This fitness allows the rider to move in balance with the horse with free and flexible movements.

Rider fitness

The requirements for rider fitness are:

- Joint suppleness
- Joint flexibility
- Correct type of musculature
- Lower back strength
- Upper body posture
- Mental confidence

Why do riders need to be fit?

As in any sport riders need the correct fitness to:

- Ride more safely
- Avoid injuries and pain
- Be effective with your riding
- Control the horse properly
- Develop mental confidence
- Enjoy the experience

How to develop fitness

Beginner riders tend to ride once a week which is sufficient for the first few months. The rider will begin to develop the correct muscles and suppleness provided they are taught correctly from the start. It is important to find and ride at an Approved Riding Establishment (see information later in this leaflet about Riding Schools).

Doing exercises at the gym or jogging will increase general fitness and strength of muscle and is helpful. However too much 'gym' fitness creates muscle mass and strength in muscles that impede riding eventually.

For all riders it is important to develop the correct type of fitness, strength in the muscle, but not muscle mass, suppleness and flexibility in the joints and freedom of movement in the lower back and hips.

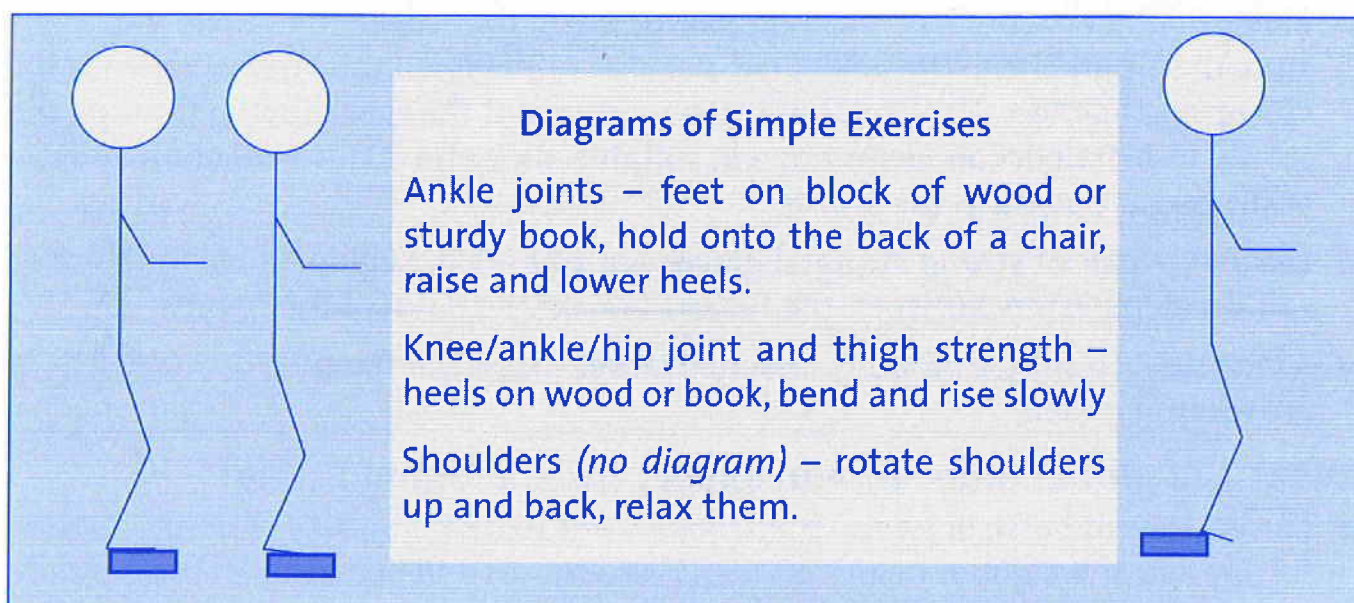
Ask the trainer at the gym for exercises that build strength in the lower back and the stomach; stretch and supple the muscles of the thighs and calves, open the chest, supple the joints and develop stamina. Simple daily exercises at home will increase and maintain suppleness and fitness, as will riding more frequently, particularly having lunge lessons from a qualified instructor.

Developing the correct type of fitness

Joint suppleness and flexibility

- The ankle joint – acts as a shock absorber and needs to be supple, fit and flexible. Keeping the heel down through a supple ankle joint, gives the rider stability, important particularly when jumping.
- Knee joint – allows free movement of lower leg to give aids whilst keeping the upper leg relaxed against the horse's side. Also acts as a shock absorber when jumping.

- Hip joints – probably the most important joint of all, the very centre of all riding. These joints need to be fit, supple and flexible to allow movement of the rider's body both in flatwork and jumping. They also allow the free movement of the horse under the rider. Stiff, unyielding hips will impede movement. The rider uses the hip joints more than any other. Even when mounting the twist of the hip creates strain within the joint.
- Lower back – another important area; includes several joints between the vertebrae. The back needs to have strength in the muscles so that the rider can control the horse's movements from the lower back, maintain his own body posture whilst at the same time allowing the free flowing movement of the horse with flexibility, balance and relaxation.
- Shoulders – these joints are often forgotten yet they are one of the foundations of 'good hands'. The shoulder joints need strength of muscle combined with flexibility and suppleness.



Mental Fitness

Mental fitness is an important part of horse riding. Beginner riders will be anxious and nervous and will require a solid, bomb proof horse or pony for their first lessons. More advanced riders need to be mentally aware and focused to control and ride the horse. Mental fitness develops from physical ability. As the rider's confidence grows so the mental confidence will increase.

It is important therefore for all riders of all levels to develop and maintain their physical fitness, to avoid injury and pain, to ride safely, to improve their riding ability and to develop mental confidence. Above all rider fitness will increase the rider's and the horse's enjoyment of the sport.

Children Riders

Mental fitness is particularly important for children many of whom may be apprehensive, though incredibly eager and excited, at beginning to ride and being around ponies.

They need to understand that being taught to ride is different from being 'at school'. The instructor may need to shout. Often it is merely the instructor having to raise the voice in a school or ménage so that the class can hear. They should not feel that this is 'shouting at them' and become sensitive about the instruction. Parents do need to be aware that children can be sensitive in this sort of environment and explain to them the reasons for this type of instruction.

Basic equipment for Beginner Riders

- An approved standard hat **MUST** be worn – a BSI or Euro standard PAS 015, EN 1384 or ASTM F1163; it must be solid and unbroken.
- The hat must fit properly.
- Jodhpurs are useful but, as a beginner rider you may not be sure if you are going to continue this sport, a pair of strong trousers without a seam on the inside of the leg is sufficient. A seam can pinch and cut into your skin as your leg is next to the saddle.
- Riding/jodhpur boots – or a strong pair of boots that covers the ankle and has a smooth sole and heel. The ankles can become rubbed and sore in contact with the stirrup and leathers. The heel is necessary to prevent the foot slipping through the stirrup iron. Trainers are definitely not suitable, they offer little protection and can easily become stuck in the stirrup.
- Gloves – a pair of strong stringed gloves are advisable. Beginners using the reins can develop blisters between the fingers and on the palm of the hands.
- A long sleeved shirt, a properly fastened jacket that is not flapping or a sweatshirt, are recommended.

What a Beginner Rider should expect from a Riding School

- Correct type of horse or pony – the school needs to have a variety of horses to cater for any age or weight of beginner rider. These horses and ponies need to be steady, stable and experienced.
- Correct Equipment – the tack should be in good condition and clean.
- Safe schooling areas for lessons – properly enclosed, surfaced and maintained.
- An approved and good standard of instruction. Inquire about the qualifications of the instructors and which instructor teaches beginner riders.
- Before choosing a School, visit first; take a tour of the stables, the riding areas, the office, the tack room. Look for the standard of facilities. Are the schools properly enclosed and safe, are the stables in good condition, do the horses seem steady?

You will not know much, if anything, about horses, but you will be able to judge if the horses are nervous, highly strung, too active, or are quiet, relaxed and bomb-proof.

Watching a lesson or two is an excellent guide for the standard of school. Have a tour of the tack room and check the tack. You will be able to judge the type of Riding school from its general appearance.

http://www.bhs.org.uk/where_to_ride/learning_to_ride.htm