

Little Riders

By: Debbie Walton

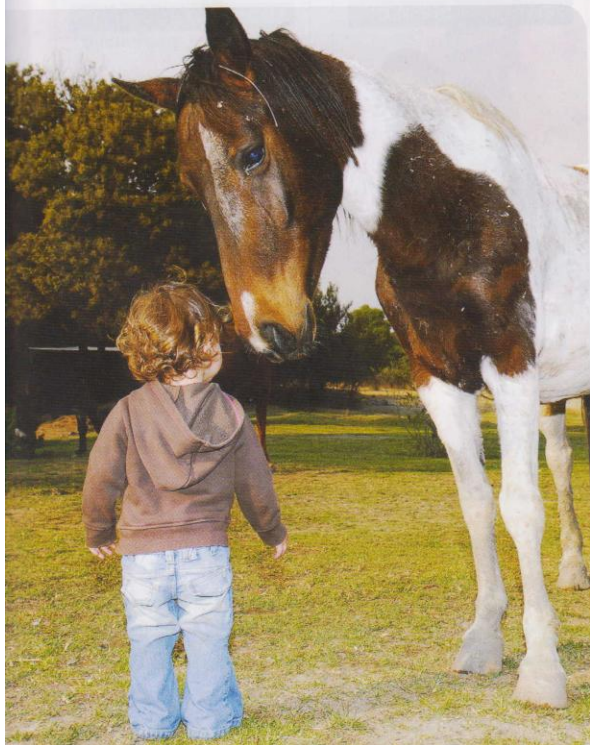
When considering introducing a child to horse riding moms immediately think: danger, broken bones, and few benefits.

And obviously, as with any sport, injury is a concern but if you're sure to take your child to a reputable riding school with very experienced instructors the risk of injury is small.

Horse riding is beneficial to all children, including those with learning problems and other disabilities, as it provides a wealth of physical and mental challenges for the rider.

Horse riding offers a great workout for both the mind and body, physically boosting the cardiovascular system and easing stresses on the mind. What stress could your child have at such a young age? Nowadays children are exposed to all kinds of pressures that need to be counteracted.

Learning to "master" such a large animal is also a huge confidence booster for your child and this sport offers the extra pleasure of forming a special bond with your partner, your horse or pony.



PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF HORSE RIDING

Horse riding is a great form of exercise that offers both cardiovascular and muscle-conditioning benefits. Although it may seem as though your child is not engaging in any physical exercise, an hour's activity can burn similar calories to that of a 30-minute jog or bike ride. Therefore, all the health benefits associated with engaging in regular cardiovascular exercises are gained.

After your child's first ride, he or she may feel muscles that they never knew they had! This is because of the movement of the horse and its effect on the rider during the ride. As the rider reacts to the horse's movements to avoid becoming off balance, the deep postural muscles of the trunk (stomach) and pelvis and the adductor muscles of the thighs are continuously being conditioned. As the horse moves, the rider is constantly thrown off balance, requiring that the rider's muscles contract and relax in an attempt to re-balance.

As mentioned, this exercise reaches the deep postural muscles of the stomach and pelvis and the adductor muscles of the thighs, but depending on the speed of the horse, other sets of muscles are working strongly, such as the quadriceps, hamstrings and gluteis during a rising trot.

Horse riding, especially trotting and cantering, increase both the respiratory and circulatory systems, which is why it is considered to be cardiovascular exercise as well as conditioning exercise.

Horse riding influences the whole person and the effect on all the body's systems can be profound. Whether the event is show jumping, dressage, cross-country or hacking along during outrides, the combination of the horse and its movement with the rider produces an extraordinary effort all over the body.

Riding a horse requires a great deal of co-ordination in order to get the desired response from the horse. Repetition of the patterned movements required in controlling the horse aid to quicken the reflexes and will therefore benefit your child in all forms of sports played.

As well as improved co-ordination and relaxation, riding stimulates the vestibular system because of the movement of the horse and its changes in direction and speed.

Horse riding is an activity that doesn't immediately jump to mind when thinking about what extramural activities to introduce to your child

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF HORSE RIDING

Horse riding is recognised as having excellent therapeutic qualities. The psychological benefits can be of equal importance to your child as the physical benefits.

In our modern society we are plagued by the fact that our children watch a lot of television, play a lot of computer games and therefore spend much of their time indoors. Simply being outdoors and enjoying the fresh air will boost your child's general wellbeing.

There is a real sense of exhilaration and freedom when riding a horse and your child will love the feeling of



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freedom while on an outride with such a large and beautiful animal.

Furthermore, developing a relationship and sense of trust between your child and his or her horse is highly rewarding. Your child will be able to enjoy fresh air and nature at the same time as doing exercise.

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF HORSE RIDING

Learning to control and care for such a large animal will have a profound effect on your child's confidence and is very satisfying. Caring for a horse will allow your child to experience a relationship, responsibility and friendship.

Horse riding as a sport also helps in creating a disciplined child. It is a sport that teaches self-discipline. It can increase

the patience levels of your child and may even improve your child's locus of control and focus.

Horse riding is also a very social extramural activity and will expose your child to so many different people and experiences.

Overall, horse riding is an activity that will benefit your child physically, mentally and emotionally and should definitely be considered when thinking about what new and interesting sports can benefit your child.

Remember to research the riding school you're thinking about taking your child to, and we even advise going out to the stables just to look around and get a feel for the place. Look for a yard with helpful staff, healthy horses, clean facilities and experienced instructors. We promise, you won't regret it and your child will love you for it! We promise...



TODAY'S CHILD SPOKE TO SOME EXPERTS IN THE HORSE RIDING FIELD, WHO BUBBLED WITH ENTHUSIASM WHEN INTERVIEWED.

"You only need to see the excitement in the children's eyes to appreciate the impact of our four-legged friends on their lives," said Horse Dynamics' Equitherapist, Madeleen van Niekerk.

Jenny Jacoby, owner of Aragon Stables in Muldersdrift, declared: *"Horse riding is a wonderful sport that rewards hard work, diligence and perseverance. The exhilaration and sense of freedom that riding gives you is unmatched by anything else!"*

Winston Churchill put it well when he said: *"The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man."*

SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR! HAPPY RIDING!

"The air of heaven is that which blows between a horse's ears."
Arabian proverb

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