

ONTARIO
EQUESTRIAN



Guide for
New Equestrians





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Welcome to the exciting world of equestrian sport.

We are Ontario Equestrian and we can help you:



Connect with resources – coaches, riding facilities, trainers



Find experts in specific areas of interest – Trail Riding, Horse Shows, Community Events; and,



Learn how to stay safe and make the most of your time in the saddle. Unlike a lot of other sports (ie., gymnastics, soccer, hockey) many equestrian participants begin as adults.

This guide is intended to give new adult riders and parents of new young riders the information you'll need to have fun and enjoy the sport. If you don't find answers to your questions here, please visit our website at www.ontarioequestrian.ca, or send your specific questions to info@ontarioequestrian.ca. You can also call us toll-free at: 1-877-441-7112.

DISCIPLINES

There are two basic styles of riding – English and Western.



English

English saddles are much smaller and lighter and the style originated from European military style saddles. They encourage the rider to be in much closer contact with the horse. English riders also ride with one hand holding each rein, using their hands (through contact with the reins to the horse's mouth), their leg and weight to guide the horses direction and impulsion.

Western

Western saddles are much larger and flatter providing comfort for riders who historically spent long periods of time driving cattle over long distances in the saddle. The large saddle also spreads the riders weight over more of the horses back. Western riders typically hold both reins loosely in one hand and steer the horse by laying the reins across the horse's neck.

GETTING STARTED

The first thing to decide is how you'd like to start. Would you prefer something relatively unstructured or would you like to take a lesson?

Some options are:

Lesson Programs

One of the most common ways to start is to enroll in a lesson program at an Equestrian Facility Riding School. These schools specialize in certain styles of riding, often referred to as “disciplines”; English or Western. School programs will typically group riders together in lessons based on their skill and experience, but schools also recognize that adults often prefer to ride and learn with other adults. Lessons are usually offered on a weekly basis, with a monthly commitment being required. Depending on where you are in the province, the size and amenities available at the facility, the skill of the lesson horses available, prices will range from approximately \$160 to \$200+ per month/4 lessons.





A Trail Ride

The horse can be tacked up for you and you'll have a guide who will take you for a leisurely walk, or something more rigorous if you're up to it. Trail Guides can be hired to take you on an individual ride, or in larger groups with friends and family, or with other riders. You could ride through a national or regional park or conservation area, on a beach, or some facilities offer interesting options like a Cattle Roundup!



Camp

There are many camps across Ontario that offer a range of sports including horseback riding, some who specialize in and offer a dedicated horseback riding program where you can ride up to twice a day. There are day camps and overnight camps for a range of age groups. When we think of camp, we tend to assume summer camp, but many equestrian facilities offer day camps during seasonal holidays, March break and even on school PA Days.

RIDING EQUIPMENT

Helmets

By law, riders under the age of 18 are required to wear an approved equestrian helmet at all times when they are riding, but helmets are not just for kids! We strongly recommend that all riders wear a helmet. For new riders, you might even consider wearing your helmet when you're tacking up your horse, until you get more comfortable with being around the horses.

Hockey, bike or other sport helmets do not provide the right protection for riding and are not a substitute for a properly fitted equestrian helmet.

Tack stores sell a range of riding helmets with a huge price range – from \$70 or less, up to over \$1,000! Any riding helmet you buy must be ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) approved, and properly fitted. And remember, the difference in price doesn't mean it's safer.

When you are buying your helmet, or a

helmet for your child, ask the staff for help to ensure the helmet fits properly. There are helmets available for young and/or small children that have a "dial" inside that allow them to grow with your child. Don't be persuaded to buy a "used" helmet. Just like child car seats and other safety devices, damage to the protective elements of the equipment are not necessarily visible – a significant impact can cause structural damage to the point where it no longer provides the intended protection. Be safe – buy new.

Tucking long hair inside the helmet, or wearing a hat inside the helmet also prevents the helmet from fitting properly. Helmet covers are available to keep heads warm on frosty Canadian days!

Riding Boots

You don't actually need "riding boots" (paddock boots or field boots, as they are sometimes called).

What you DO need is a boot with a defined heel that is at least 3 cm (1/2 inch) tall to keep a rider's foot from sliding through the stirrup. At the same time, you don't want a heel that is too high. Even rubber boots will suffice, if they have a defined heel. Running shoes, flip flops, or sandals won't do the job.

Not unlike helmets, there is a huge range of pricing for equestrian boots if you are willing to spend the money – tall "field" boots, short "paddock" boots, winter and summer boots, from simple to very fancy. There is no safety designation for boots so feel free to be thrifty. This is one area where you can look at second hand boots – often parents of growing children at a riding school have hand-me-downs to offer!

When you're thinking about shoes, don't forget that the shoes you wear riding are the same shoes you'll have on when you're standing around and beside your horse when you are grooming, mounting and dismounting and walking around in the barn. If you're coming for summer camp, pack your sandals to wear outside the barn.



Riding Gloves

Riding gloves are worth considering. They can be relatively inexpensive, and they typically have a bumpy or tacky surface on the inside of the hands and fingers that help the rider grip the reins, and also protect the hands if the reins slip through the rider's fingers.



Riding Clothes

Riders may decide they want to invest a bit of money in breeches, chaps or other specialty riding wear, but it's certainly not necessary. You'll notice that riding breeches have "knee patches" which are patches that start at the inside of the knee and continue to below to the mid or lower calf. These patches provide extra protection and grip for the portion of your leg that is against the saddle when you ride. With more experience and time in the saddle, you may find that the extra grip these patches provide makes a difference in your comfort level and gives you a feeling of security when you ride. Jeans or stretch pants and an athletic shirt are perfectly adequate for a beginner rider.



FIND A COACH

Of all the things you do that will impact on your safety and enjoyment of the sport, we strongly encourage you to find a certified coach or instructor to introduce you to the sport. According to The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (as reported on the Trillium Foundation Website - www.otf.ca) “Quality programming and facilities matter to participation rates. Higher-quality programming – programming that is inclusive, fun, fair, safe, age and ability appropriate, and supported by trained coaches and officials – builds confidence. That confidence in turn increases participation and lifelong retention. Participants with an untrained coach have an attrition rate of 26% compared to 5% for children coached by trained individuals.” The equestrian coach certification process requires that coaches have demonstrated equestrian experience that enables them to ensure that, for new riders:

- the horse being ridden is appropriate for the rider’s skill level
- that the riding area is safe - free from obstacles and properly enclosed
- that riders have assistance to mount and dismount their horses safely, and
- MOST IMPORTANTLY that riders feel safe and are safe during lessons. There are over 1,600 Ontario coaches and instructors currently enrolled in the national certification program, but not all riding coaches are certified.

Equestrian Coaches and Instructors are eligible and encouraged to be certified under the National Coach Certification Program (NCCP). This program trains and tests coaches in the areas of:

- ✓ Concussion Awareness
- ✓ First Aid
- ✓ “Making Ethical Decisions” (national test)
- ✓ Riding, Nutrition and Horse Health
- ✓ Performance Analysis
- ✓ Lesson Planning
- ✓ Delivering a safe and effective lesson

In addition, certified coaches and instructors must complete:

- ✓ Ongoing professional development; and
- ✓ Formal screening (criminal record check).

And finally, certified coaches and instructors are bound by a national code of conduct.



FIND A PLACE TO RIDE

Ontario Equestrian hosts a Facility Partner Program which provides benefits to horseback riding facility owners and operators in exchange for their commitment to maintain a set of basic industry standards that are intended to address safety standards for riders and care of the horses.

All Riding Schools, Camps and Trail programs are encouraged to become members of Ontario Equestrian's Facility Partner Program, to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining at least a minimum standard in the delivery of their programs.

There are also accredited facilities that are specifically equipped to accommodate disabled riders with the necessary equipment and training for their horses and coaches to ensure a fun and safe experience.

The requirements for facility partnership are:

- ✓ A minimum of \$2M liability insurance;
- ✓ An Emergency Action Plan;
- ✓ Rider Waivers for Adults and Children;
- ✓ Facility Rules; and
- ✓ Signed Accreditation Standards Checklist

ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Sport training (whether for fun, recreation or high performance competition) are guided by principles of "Long Term Athlete Development" (known as LTAD). For more information on Long Term Athlete Development, go to www.sportforlife.ca

Long Term Athlete Development recognizes that certain aspects of equestrian activity and training are appropriate at certain ages and stages of physical, mental and social development to keep riders safe, having fun and continuing to enjoy the sport throughout their lifetime.

Riders with disabilities are encouraged to participate, and there are specially trained coaches and facilities to help riders get started and progress up to the Para-Olympic level! LTAD Stages are:

- ✓ Active Start (0-6 years)
- ✓ FUNdamentals (6-9 years)
 - o The Active Start and FUNdamentals stages are primarily aimed at developing physical literacy – developing a range of movement skills for sport and physical activity.
- ✓ Learning to Train (8-12 years)
- ✓ Training to Train (11-16 years)
 - o These stages are aimed at developing early competitive sport skills which may lead to an athlete moving in a more competitive direction, or competing for fun

- ✓ Training to Compete (15+ years)
- ✓ Training to Win (18+ years)
 - o These stages are aimed primarily at the developing excellence in competitors
- ✓ Active for Life
 - o All of the LTAD Stages from Learning to Train on can be enjoyed by athletes young and old who are riding for fun and personal development, to enjoy the challenge and sense of accomplishment that comes with improving skills.

These principles have been translated into Learn to Ride programs for English and Western Riding, and a new program to be released soon aimed at the Active Start and FUNdamentals stages of development.

As athletes move into the competitive phases of the sport, Certified Competition Coaches, Competition Coach Specialists and High Performance Coaches prepare annual training programs for individual athletes to guide their development throughout the season.

Equestrian is considered a "Late Maturation" sport, which means that athletes often ride, train and compete up to the highest levels, well into their adult years.

One of the great things about riding, is that it is a sport that you can enjoy throughout your life, whether you are able bodied or facing physical challenges, male or female, young or old.



WHY CHOOSE RIDING

- ✓ Riding can be enjoyed year-round, as an indoor or outdoor sport
- ✓ Boys and girls, men and women ride together; often families learn and ride together
- ✓ As a physical activity, one hour of riding will burn calories equivalent to a 30 minute jog or bicycle ride
- ✓ Get close to nature
- ✓ With experience, riding becomes a calming and relaxing experience; a great Stress Buster. Feeling down? Saddle up!
- ✓ You have the opportunity to bond with a horse – a highly social and sensitive animal. This is the bond that often brings people back to the sport throughout their lifetime.
- ✓ The physical skills you will develop as a rider include:
 - o Overall balance and co-ordination
 - o Muscle strength
 - o Improved visual perception
 - o Eye-hand co-ordination
 - o Cardiovascular fitness
- ✓ The mental and emotional skills you will develop include:
 - o Critical thinking and problem solving
 - o Confidence building
 - o Impulse control



The Community
for Equestrian Sport in Ontario

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