

Lifesaving Horseback-Riding Helmet Tips

Your head is vulnerable if you tumble from the height of a horse. Here's how your riding helmet can cushion the fall.

Today's helmet manufacturers are designing better and safer, helmets than ever before in an ongoing effort to reduce the number of head injuries. Shown is a helmet by Troxel.

Think about the last time you fell off your horse. Most likely, you were doing an ordinary activity when the unexpected occurred. That's why it's a good idea to wear a riding helmet every time you work around and ride your horse. You never know when and how an accident will occur.

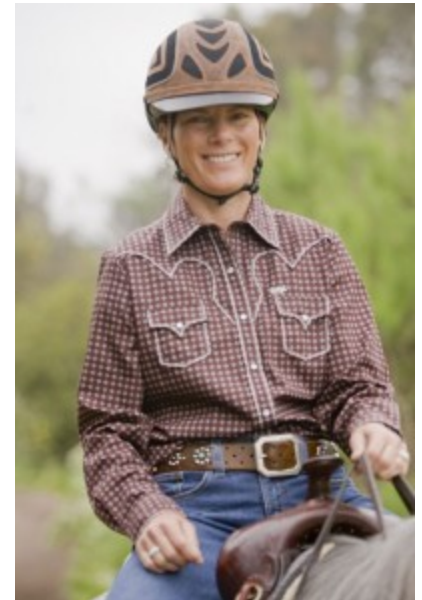
Here are six handy helmet tips that can save your life.

- **Know your risk of injury.** The danger to your head in a fall isn't just the possibility of cracking your skull or sustaining a gash if your horse's hoof hits your head. Many head injuries are actually injuries to the brain. When you're moving and your head meets a solid object (usually the ground), your brain doesn't immediately stop its motion. It continues forward, often hitting the opposite side of your skull from where the impact occurred.
- **Look for the ASTM/SEI hangtag.** When shopping for a riding helmet, look for one that conforms to ASTM/SEI safety standards. That means it's passed tests by the [Safety Equipment Institute](#) based on standards set by the [American Society for Testing and Materials](#). These tests are designed to emulate impacts that can occur in a fall from a horse. The helmets meeting these thresholds have an outside shell built to resist impact coupled with cushioning material inside the helmet to protect your skull and brain.
- **Make sure it fits.** Proper fit allows the helmet to do its job. Not only do you need to find the correct size, everyone's head has a different shape. The brand of helmet that fits your friend's head may not be right for you. The helmet should sit comfortably on your head. When you hold your head still and rock the helmet, your scalp should move with it. *Note:* If your head is an in-between size, you can replace the pads inside the helmet with the thicker or thinner ones the manufacturer often provides.
- **Wear your hair down.** If you have long hair, fasten it at the nape of your neck rather than putting it up under the helmet. Too much hair under the helmet can affect its fit and function.
- **Fasten the harness strap.** ASTM-approved/SEI-certified helmets have a sturdy harness strap bolted on to secure the helmet to your head. Properly latch the harness strap at all times. If your helmet goes flying off your head before you hit the ground, it won't do you any good. Fit the harness strap under your chin snugly yet comfortably.
- **Watch the safety video.** To encourage equestrians to use a helmet, the Washington State University Cooperative Extension and the Washington State 4-H Foundation have produced a 20-minute video, narrated by William Shatner, called *Every Time...Every Ride*. It blends interviews with video of horses in many sports, showing the benefits of wearing a proper helmet and the consequences of riding without one. To order the video, So wear a riding helmet, no matter what activity you plan with your horse today. It only takes a minute, and it could save your life.

Injury-Risk Facts & Stats

Here are important injury-risk facts and statistics, courtesy of the Equestrian Medical Safety Association.

- ◆ Between 12 to 15 million persons in the United States ride a horse or pony every year.
- ◆ Approximately 20 percent of horse-related injuries occur on the ground.
- ◆ Most riding injuries occur during pleasure riding.



- ◆ Head injuries are the most common reason among riders for admission to the hospital or death.
- ◆ A fall from two feet can cause permanent brain damage. A horse elevates a rider eight feet or more above ground.
- ◆ A human skull can be shattered by an impact of 4 to 6 miles per hour. Horses can gallop at 30 to 40 miles per hour.
- ◆ According to the National Electronic Surveillance System figures, the most likely ages for injury is 5 to 14 years old and 25 to 44 years old. Each age bracket has about 20 percent of the injuries.
- ◆ A rider who has one head injury has a 40 percent chance of suffering a second head injury. Children, teens, and young adults are most vulnerable to sudden death from *second impact syndrome*: severe brain swelling as a result of suffering a second head injury before recovery from the first head injury.
- ◆ Death isn't the only serious outcome of unprotected head injuries. Those who survive with brain injury may suffer epilepsy, intellectual and memory impairment, and personality changes.
- ◆ Hospital costs for an acute head injury can be in the range of \$25,000 per day. Lifetime extended care costs may easily exceed \$3 million. There's no funding for rehabilitation outside the medical setting.
- ◆ Helmets work. Most deaths from head injury can be prevented by wearing ASTM-approved/SEI certified helmets that fit correctly and have the harness firmly applied. Other types of helmets, including bike helmets, are inadequate.
- ◆ Racing organizations require helmets and as a result, jockeys now suffer fewer head injuries than pleasure riders. The United States Pony Clubs, Inc., lowered its head injury rate 29 percent with mandatory helmet use.

<http://www.extension.org/pages/11413/demonstrations-of-falls>

Click above for the video clip, "Demonstrations of Falls," courtesy of the Washington State University extension, as part of its Equine Helmet Safety: Every Time...Every Ride program.

Today's helmet manufacturers are designing better and safer, helmets than ever before in an ongoing effort to reduce the number of head injuries. This is important, because according to the [Equestrian Medical Safety Association](#) (formerly the American Medical Equine Association/Safe Riders Foundation), head injuries account for 20 percent of all equestrian injuries; 60 percent of fatalities occur from head injuries.

When shopping for a riding helmet for trail riding, look for one that conforms to ASTM/SEI safety standards, such as this helmet by Troxel.

