



# Physical Activity: HORSEBACK RIDING

While participants are horseback riding, they are getting lots of health benefits. The information in this packet provides information about those benefits; from the muscles horseback riding develops to the way it makes people feel.

This packet supplements what you will be doing during horseback riding. You do have to get participants to recognize that this activity is great for their physical and emotional health, but you can do that in the way that best works for your group and you. These materials offer lots of different ideas for incorporating the health components into your already fabulously planned session.

Read the Facilitator's Guide in order to understand Frost Valley's physical activity initiative, to effectively use the materials in your session, and for ways to encourage physical activity among your participants in and beyond Frost Valley.

This chart, also featured in the Facilitator's Guide, highlights each of the sections in this module. This can guide you in selecting what to focus on during the session.

<b>Description</b>	Gives a profile of hiking's health benefits
<b>Type of Activity</b>	Explains how horseback riding is anaerobic
<b>Where It Fits within the Recommended Amount of Physical Activity</b>	Points out where horseback riding fits within the suggested recommended 60 minutes of daily exercise
<b>Parts of Body Used</b>	Names parts of the body that horseback riding uses
<b>Muscles Affected</b>	Names the specific muscles that horseback riding builds
<b>Health Benefits</b>	Lists horseback riding's overall health benefits
<b>How It Makes You Feel</b>	Explains horseback riding's positive emotional benefits
<b>Suggestions for Ways to Incorporate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Day 1:</b> Offers suggestions for introducing horseback riding's health benefits during the first day of the session</li><li><b>Following Sessions:</b> Gives lots of ideas for reinforcing participants' knowledge of horseback riding's health benefits during the remaining sessions</li></ul>
<b>Some Fun Ideas</b>	Offers ideas for games and other activities that build participant awareness of horseback riding's health benefits
<b>Interesting Facts</b>	Generates interest in horseback riding
<b>Evaluation</b>	Presents a modifiable questionnaire about participants' views on horseback riding and about whether they will continue beyond Frost Valley

## DESCRIPTION

There are those who think that riding a horse DOES have physical benefits . . . but only for the horse. Actually, horseback riding, an exercise of moderate intensity, has a positive physical and emotional impact.

Horseback riding works important core muscles: abs, back, pelvis, and thighs. These stabilize the torso while fortifying coordination, stability, balance, and flexibility.

This activity is isometric, which means the muscles contract against something that does not move. Your muscles tense until you feel a bit of strain and then release the tension. (Participants can see how an isometric exercise makes muscles contract by pressing their palms together in front of their chest. Have them press as hard as they can. What do they feel? Did their palms move?) In horseback riding, you have to contract your core muscles to keep your balance on the horse.

Depending on the type of riding (e.g., when a horse is trotting) and the speed and agility of the horse, horseback riding can require of a rider more effort, energy, and cardiovascular capacity. And the rider can use more energy by doing the heavy work in the stable and grooming his or her horse.

Lifting heavy feedbags, shoveling out stalls, leading horses in and out of the barn/stables also strengthen muscles and increase cardiovascular capacity.

Horseback riding has an emotional impact, too, as riders develop deep compassion for horses. Another unique benefit is the opportunity to bond with a horse. Some riders describe a “zen-like” feeling as they move as one with a horse.

## TYPE OF ACTIVITY: Anaerobic

Horseback riding, depending on the style and the activity, offers riders different ways to exert energy at levels that are as high as those in other sports. For example, cantering or galloping on a horse requires the same degree of exertion as a game of tennis! Jumping uses almost the same amount of energy as a round of handball. And believe it or not, cleaning out stables, in terms of energy, is close to a game of golf. So horseback riding builds fitness, for sure.<sup>i</sup>

Horseback riding activities ranked from highest to lowest levels of energy exertion:

1. Jumping
2. Playing polo
3. Cantering or galloping
4. Trotting
5. General riding
6. Saddling, cleaning, grooming, etc.
7. Doing chores (feeding, lifting feed bags, walking, mucking out stalls)
8. Walking (riding a horse as it walks)
9. Driving a horse cart<sup>ii</sup>

## WHERE IT FITS WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED AMOUNT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Horseback riding provides the benefits of a moderate-intensity exercise if done for a half-hour or more three times a week. That means that your remaining exercise time (based on a recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity) can be dedicated to aerobic exercise.

You can do other exercises that will make you a stronger and more efficient rider and will contribute to your daily 60 minutes of physical activity. Here are some examples:

- Strength: for arms, push-ups and planks (an exercise that tightens core muscles by using the arms to raise the body off the floor and hold it straight and rigid, like a plank of wood); for legs, squats and lunges
- Aerobic/cardiovascular: 20-30 minutes of brisk walking, walking/jogging

Inner and outer glutes work

PARTS OF BODY USED	MUSCLES AFFECTED (See <i>Terms to Know</i> in Facilitator's Guide)	HEALTH BENEFITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Upper &amp; lower legs</li><li>• Heart</li><li>• Lungs</li><li>• Abs</li><li>• Hips</li><li>• Buttocks</li><li>• Lower back</li><li>• Inner thighs</li><li>• Arms</li><li>• Shoulders</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quads (<i>Quadriceps</i>)</li><li>• Hamstrings</li><li>• Pelvic muscles</li><li>• Abductors</li><li>• Hip flexors</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improves posture</li><li>• Enhances balance and coordination</li><li>• Develops core strength</li><li>• Strengthens muscles</li><li>• Boosts the cardiovascular system, especially during trotting because of the horse's gait</li><li>• Improves the digestive system (and stimulates the appetite!)</li><li>• Promotes faster reflexes</li><li>• Stretches tight muscles throughout the body</li><li>• Increases range of motion in joints</li></ul>

## HOW IT MAKES YOU FEEL

- Gives you a sense of excitement
- Makes you cheerful
- Builds self-confidence (especially from being able to manage a large animal)
- Gets you active and energized
- Develops pride
- Relaxes and calms you
- Makes you compassionate toward your horse
- Encourages you to enjoy the outdoors and feel closer to nature
- Builds a sense of responsibility
- Develops patience and self-discipline

## SUGGESTIONS FOR WAYS TO INCORPORATE

### DAY 1

1. When introducing the horseback riding program, begin by asking participants:

- Who has ridden a horse before? Where did you ride?
- What do/did you like about horseback riding? What don't/didn't you like?
- What do you think of horseback riding as exercise? Do you think it gives you a good workout? Explain why or why not.
- What parts of the body do you think get the most benefit from horseback riding?
- How might horseback riding make you feel?

2. Point out that horseback riding is a good physical activity, and that it also makes you feel good in many ways. Build on what participants noted about its benefits. Share other benefits with the group.

3. When modeling the basics of beginner English riding (how to sit on the horse, how to stop, etc.), have participants observe and point out which parts of the body and which muscles are working the most during the various lesson sequences.

4. Introduce a chart or journal that participants can use to log their riding and fitness (physical and mental) progress during the session. For each new riding skill they learn, they should identify what parts of the body get the most impact/benefit, describe their feelings during riding, note what aspects of riding they have improved in (for example, their posture is better, their legs are stronger), etc.

## **FOLLOWING SESSIONS**

1. Couple training with games that work on specific skills or target specific parts of the body so they can build strength and experience a good "workout." This kind of focused exercise can help participants improve other aspects of riding, including balance, coordination, posture, etc. See Sample Games, below.
2. After each session, encourage participants to participate in strengthening, stretching, and aerobic activity to improve either certain riding skills or their overall riding. At the start of each session, ask participants questions like:
  - What activity did you do? How long did you do it?
  - With horseback riding and your other physical activities, do you think you did your 60 minutes' worth of daily exercise?
  - How do you think this exercise/these exercises will help you improve your horseback riding skills?
3. During the last session, hold a Progress Ride in which participants do a series of basic and perhaps additional riding exercises that challenge them, and they explain how and why they progressed physically since the first day of the program. Discuss with participants their overall experience with horseback riding, with a focus on how it made them feel and whether they see doing this activity in their future.

## **SOME FUN IDEAS**

1. Encourage participants to try a new activity at camp and to compare it with horseback riding.
2. One way to measure the amount of daily physical activity is by counting the number of steps taken in a day. On average, there are 2,000 steps per mile (about 30 minutes of continuous activity). Participants can calculate the number of steps they have taken during horseback riding using the number of minutes they have participated in it. The comparison looks like this:

RIDING	10 min	15 min.	20 min.	30 min.	60 min.
# of STEPS	1,401	2,102	2,802	4,203	8,406

Fifteen minutes of horseback riding is just a bit over a mile's worth of steps! There are recommended guidelines for the number of steps that make up moderate to intense physical activity and can add up to the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity. For young people, 9,000 steps is the magic number.

Participants can chart the steps they have taken in a day, including horseback riding, general walking (using a pedometer), and other activities. Post the Step Conversion table on page 12 of the Facilitator's Guide for participants to see, and/or distribute it for them to refer to at the end of each day. Have participants share their step rates, looking at increased activity, the effect on their bodies, etc.

3. Here is a variation on the step-based measurement of physical activity: 2,000 steps equals one mile; 10,000 steps equals five miles. Post the Mileage Conversion Chart on pages 13–15 of the Facilitator’s Guide for participants to see, and/or distribute it for them to refer to at the end of each day. Have participants share how many steps they took/miles they covered.

4. Participants can create a horseback riding game that develops a certain aspect of a riding technique. They can share it with the instructor, who can modify it and then have fellow participants play the game.

## HIKING: Interesting facts

Each year in the United States, an estimated 7 million people in the United States ride horses.<sup>iii</sup>

Becoming confident on a horse opens up a path to many other related activities — for example, polo and eventing (contests during equestrian events), which includes dressage (a competition in which horses perform special movements in response to signals from their riders), show jumping, and cross-country riding.<sup>iv</sup>

At age 71, Japanese equestrian rider Hiroshi Hoketsu competed in the 2012 Olympics in individual dressage. He finished 40th in the individual dressage event.<sup>v</sup> Hoketsu is the oldest Olympian to ever compete for Japan, and is the third oldest Olympian to compete ever.<sup>vi</sup>

At 18, Reed Kessler was named to the U.S. show jumping team for the 2012 Olympic Games in London, making her the youngest show jumping competitor in Olympic history.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2010, 12-year-old Hunter Holloway won her first Dallas Harvest Grand Prix class, making her the youngest rider ever to win a national standard Grand Prix.<sup>viii</sup>

## EVALUATION

1. How FUN would you say horseback riding is? Choose the number that shows what you think.

**3** = A lot of fun   **2** = Pretty fun   **1** = A little fun   **0** = No fun

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2. How HEALTHY would you say horseback riding is? Choose the number that shows what you think.

**3** = Very healthy   **2** = Pretty healthy   **1** = A little healthy   **0** = Not healthy

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3. Which parts of your body would you say got the best workout from horseback riding?

- Legs
  - Hips
  - Shoulders and neck
  - Lower back
  - Heart
  - Lungs
  - Whole body
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4. How often might you participate in horseback riding again at Frost Valley? Choose the number that shows what you think.

**3** = Very often   **2** = Pretty often   **1** = Rarely   **0** = Never

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5. How often might you participate in horseback riding again after leaving Frost Valley? Choose the number that shows what you think.

**3** = Often   **2** = Sometimes   **1** = Not very often   **0** = Hardly ever  
(everyday)   (once a week)   (once a month)   (once a year)

## **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>i</sup>Wilkinson, John, "How Does Horseback Riding Compare to Other Workouts?" [Internet - WWW, URL] <http://www.horsecollaborative.com/how-does-horseback-riding-compare-to-other-workouts/>, 08 September 2014.

<sup>ii</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup>Riders for Helmets.com, "Equestrian Sport Statistics & Facts; What You Should Know" [Internet - WWW, URL]<http://www.riders4helmets.com/2011/02/equestrian-sport-statistics-facts-what-you-should-know/>, 13 February 2011.

<sup>iv</sup>KalliKids Children's Horse Riding: Fun Facts & Ideas [Internet - WWW, URL]  
<http://www.kallikids.com/en/KalliKids/For-families/expert-pin-boards/index.cfm/page/horse-riding>.

<sup>v</sup>Top End Sports, "Oldest and Youngest Olympians (Summer Games)" [Internet - WWW, URL],  
<http://www.topendsports.com/events/summer/oldest-youngest.htm>.

<sup>vi</sup> Wikipedia. "Hiroshi Hoketsu." [Internet - WWW, URL] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroshi\\_Hoketsu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroshi_Hoketsu)

<sup>vii</sup>Longines, "Reed Kessler" [Internet - WWW, URL]

<http://www.globalchampionstour.com/profiles/riders/2242/reed-kessler/>.

<sup>viii</sup>The Legal Equestrian. "Hunter Holloway: Making Her Mark on All Three Rings" [Internet - WWW, URL]  
<http://thelegalequestrian.com/2015/01/28/hunter-holloway-making-her-mark-on-all-3-rings/>, 28 January 2015.