



AVALON TEACHING FARM, L3C

Equestrian Centre Rider Fitness Safety Information

Horseback riding is a sport. Unlike any other sport, there is another living being that must be considered when determining a person's ability to participate safely. Horses are obviously large animals, on average 10 times the size of their riders, but they are still limited by their own biomechanics. A horse that is uncomfortable with their rider might react poorly when they wouldn't normally.

When determining a person's fitness to ride, several things must be taken into consideration.

Rider Size

Smaller riders - a rider whose legs do not reach far enough down the sides of the horse is at more serious risk of falling off than a rider whose legs do reach around the barrel of the horse. Very small riders may need side-walkers, or may have to wait until they are taller to participate.

Larger riders - the long used "industry standard" is that a horse cannot carry more than 20% of their own weight, but the actual application of that rule is more complicated than just weight. A rider's leg to body proportion is actually more important than simply weight. Also, horses have their own limitations and different shape horses can carry more or less than that industry standard 20%.

Rider Physical Fitness

It might look like the rider just sits there, but riding is more work than it looks! Like with any new physical activity, one should begin a riding program carefully to avoid injury, but some things to consider before starting are:

- **Flexibility** - Not only does a rider have to get on and off of a horse, there is a lot of stretching while riding!
- **Endurance** - A reasonable level of cardio-vascular fitness is needed. Being able to walk quickly for 15 minutes interspersed with several sessions of jogging for 3 to 5 minutes is a good starting point.
- **Core Strength** - This is what holds you safely on the horse. Your core keeps your leg still and your upper body in position.
- **Muscle Strength** - Riding is less about shear strength of arms and legs than it is the core, but you still must have the ability to control your arms and legs independently.

When filling out the enrollment form, please use **+** (excellent) or **0** (neutral) or **-** (not great) to score the rider's fitness in the above areas.

Each rider will be evaluated for safety before starting horseback riding lessons. It may be necessary for a potential student to increase overall fitness before starting horseback riding lessons. We try to have horses to accommodate all rider shapes and sizes, but it is not always possible to find the right horse candidates for the job. Attitude is key!