

SUPPORT  
for the  
THINKING  
RIDER

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Equestrian Medical Safety Association

## Prescription for Equestrian Safety

Formerly known as the American Medical Equestrian Association/Safe Riders Foundation (AMEA/SRF), the Equestrian Medical Safety Association (EMSA) is dedicated to the philosophy, principles and application of safety of people in equestrian activities. This purpose is achieved through education, research and resource.

### MISSION STATEMENT

EDUCATION of health care professionals, organization representatives and individuals, including an emphasis on public awareness;

RESEARCH to better define injury patterns and risks, efficacy of safety measures and equipment, and assistance in equipment design;

A RESOURCE of experience and expertise to be shared and utilized for the benefit of equestrian safety.

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## Eventing Safety: The Question of Rider Fitness

BY ELIZABETH TROUTMAN

Could the level of physical fitness a rider brings to the saddle, considered along with the stamina and strength of the equestrian athlete, impact the way the horse moves and performs during an event or race? Equestrian trainers and researchers confirm this is true, and they recommend staying in peak physical condition as another way the rider can minimize the risk of horse falls in eventing.

The United States Eventing Association and United States Equestrian Federation approached the issue of rider physical fitness at their Eventing Safety Summit, held June 7-8.

Hilary Clayton, BVMS, PhD, MRCVS, Mary Anne McPhail Dressage Chair in Equine Sports Medicine at Michigan State University, said a horse performs better with a physically fit rider who controls his or her positioning. A tired, unfit rider's lack of balance or unpredictable movement disrupts a horse's rhythm and balance, and it requires the horse to use more energy.

"From the horse's point of view, a tired rider has less con-

trol over his or her position and is likely to move on the horse's back in an unpredictable manner," Clayton said.

She explained that in racing and eventing, riders have a history of making physical fitness a high priority, although being physically fit is not emphasized as much in other equestrian sports.

Mike Pilato is a certified athletic trainer who has worked with equestrian athletes in several disciplines. Pilato said he views the horse-rider partnership as a single system that engages two athletes. The horse and the rider together participate in the sport as tools that must cooperate and work as a single system. He said the rider is better equipped as a tool to work in this system when he or she incorporates exercises and techniques to address the specific demands imposed by the horse.

"There is a lot we don't know about the equestrian athlete," Pilato noted. "In the overwhelming majority of other sports, we have physical data to describe the athlete at any given level."

Pilato said besides focusing on strength training, equestrian athletes need to consider working on other components of athletic ability, such as hand-eye coordination and agility. He emphasizes the benefit from strength training routines off the horse, suggesting specific exercises that include bent-knee heel raises and standing chest presses that utilize a resistance band. Cardiovascular workouts out of the saddle also benefit the rider. Pilato said because everything in riding happens in milliseconds, staying in peak physical condition could give riders an advantage when it comes to creating a defense response, such as when the horse stumbles or stops suddenly.

"If you train to improve your athletic performance, you make yourself a better tool and are better able to respond to the horse," Pilato said. "Maybe you widen the gray zone for staying on the horse, maybe there's something in training the athletic performance side that gives you another millisecond, but it's very hard to say."

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## Holding Up Our End of the Bargain

We all remember that angelic school horse in our past that somehow managed to shift right just as the beginner rider was losing her balance and sliding off to that side. These equine saints will always be remembered fondly by both their riders and the instructors for helping people learn to ride. In my early riding world in Bedford, Mass., some of those horses included Jubel, Clover, Tom Terrific, and Sambo, to name a few. Those horses were excellent “schoolies” that helped many children and adults learn how to ride, show, and event at the local level. They also tolerated some of the “out of school” activities including our secret bareback rides with the halter and lead rope either on a late night rendezvous through the field in the summer, or galloping through the deep snow until we either dove or fell off, laughing and frozen.

Back then I walked or rode my bike to the barn, worked after school and on weekends at the barn and a feed store warehouse in order to ride, hiked and backpacked with Girl Scouts, played field hockey and rode horses. We also rode our bikes “up town”, played impromptu games of kickball, kick the can, and hide and seek with the neighborhood kids.

Now, fast forward to the present, where I and many adults spend more time riding our computer at work than horses, commute to work in a car, and work extended hours behind the desk or at “inactive” jobs. And, examine the lifestyle of many of today’s youth,

where their strongest body parts may be their thumbs... due to electronics, video and computer games, Twitter, instant messaging (IM), and text messaging. Why ride your bike to your buddy’s place when they are already there on Facebook, MySpace, or IM, just a click away. Many young riders are always driven to the barn because of distance, schedules, traffic, or potential predators.

It is no surprise that our society is heavier than ever, based on current lifestyles. But, these issues become critical when we ask our horses to perform, but we are not physically able to hold up our end of the bargain. This issue of the EMSA newsletter has some great information on the importance of incorporating fitness, skills, competence, and confidence in the development of new

riders in “Rider Development: The Core of Riding Safety”. In another article by Elizabeth Troutman, she points out how we can not only put our horse at a competitive disadvantage, but also in potentially dangerous situations if we, as riders, do not have the fitness or stamina necessary for the level of competition.

It is time to recognize and to take more responsibility for our part of the bargain if we expect our horses to do the work. Begin taking steps to incorporate daily activities into your lifestyle that will increase your fitness level, stamina, and flexibility. You will feel better and your horse will appreciate it too!

Enjoy and be safe!

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Pamela Roberts

## Letter from the President

**Deborah F. Stanitski, M.D.**  
EMSA President

Dear Fellow Equine Enthusiasts,

I'm happy to share several exciting EMSA updates. Our organization had excellent exposure to many of the attendees at the Equine Extravaganza, July 11-13, at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds in Raleigh. I interacted with equine industry members from all equestrian disciplines at our EMSA booth, that featured our new EMSA brochure as well as the "Wake Up To Concussion" and "When Can My Child Ride" informational brochures. Also included were a stack of Betsy Greene's helmet posters and a new helmet with its pamphlet on correct fitting. Wendy Wergeles provided the EMSA banner with our logo that served as a booth backdrop. On Sunday morning, I gave a PowerPoint presentation on general EMSA information and our mission, as well as current NEISS statistics provided by Dr. Doris Bixby-Hammett.

On July 24 and 25, I attended an ImPACT conference in Pittsburgh concerning updated head injury information in sports. I met a number of involved professionals, including one who has agreed to provide an article for a future newsletter.

Our "old" (1994) and lengthy safety video is available on the website. This video was originally produced by Dr. William Lee with financial aid from a grant by the Neil Ayer Foundation. A portable DVD version is available for purchase via a link on our website to Mr. Austin Lee's website (Dr. Lee's son).

The EMSA "trailer" to the Nutrena safety video will not be available until the company uses up their current supply. I have been assured that this will occur within the next several months.

—DEBBIE

### A Friend Has Passed...

EMSA joins family, friends, and members of the horse world in mourning the loss of Debbie Miller Atkinson on September 30, 2008. She was well known as an instructor, competitor and coach. Since 1987, Debbie trained and evented horses ranging from Novice to Advanced levels. In 2006, she sustained a severe spinal cord injury as a result of a fall at the Kentucky Classic Horse Trials. Debbie was known for her spirit and courage, and she was an inspiration to many before and following her accident. For more information on her career, challenges, and the difference that she made in the lives of others, visit Debbie's web page at <http://www.usea3.org/Debbie-Atkinson/index.html>.

## EMSA Bios

### Maureane Hoffman, MD, PhD



Maureane was born and raised in Los Alamos, N.M. As a youth, she spent most of her leisure time with the horse that her parents gave her when she was ten years old. In 1973 she took her horse to New

Mexico State University where she majored in Animal Science, with Veterinary aspirations.

In her senior year, she decided to pursue graduate work in pharmacology. She attended the University of Iowa and subsequently joined the Medical Scientist Training Program, graduating with her MD and PhD in 1982.

She then took her horse to North Carolina where she did her residency training in Pathology at Duke University. She was appointed as the Associate Director of the Transfusion Service position at the University of North Carolina. She is now a tenured Professor of Pathology at Duke University and Director of the Blood Bank and the Hematology Laboratories at the affiliated VA Hospital.

She continues to raise and train horses and compete in eventing as well as fostering and training horses for the US Equine Rescue League.

### Pat Maykuth, PhD



Pat grew up fox hunting in Western Pennsylvania. Much of that time was spent retraining steeplechase horses to the hunt field. She became an A Pony Clubber and continued to compete in horse shows, events

and dressage. In between college and graduate school Pat took a few years to ride and compete. Although no longer a serious competitor, Pat rides, trains and coaches those who enjoy jumping at speed.

Over several years Pat has organized eventing competitions in Pennsylvania, Wyoming and Louisiana. She has served on the organizing committee of several 3-Days, and FEI competitions around the country. As an Eventing and Dressage Technical Delegate, Pat is a familiar official at events and shows. For many years she served in the US Combined Training Association's Education Committee, chaired the Licensed Officials Seminars Committee, and more recently has joined the US Eventing Association Safety Committee.

Pat earned her PhD in Psychology from Emory University and has been president of Research Design Associates, a contract and

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# The Older Rider

DR. JESSICA JAHIEL



*JESSICA JAHIEL, PH.D. is an internationally recognized author, clinician and lecturer. Her books, articles and columns about horses, riding, and training have received awards and critical acclaim. Dr. Jahiel has a free electronic Q&A newsletter available at [www.horse-sense.org](http://www.horse-sense.org). For more information about her writing and teaching, visit her at [www.jessicajahiel.com](http://www.jessicajahiel.com).*

I've been hearing from many instructors who have spent years working with young riding students. Suddenly they are finding themselves working with more and more adult riders. These changes in student populations are not trivial – many instructors are faced with unfamiliar types of students and must find ways to reach and teach them.

## Fear

Children typically have little or no fear. Adults have plenty of fear. Adults are far more aware of the potential for damage to their bodies, their brains, their lives and their bank accounts. For a child, fear of falling off is usually linked to fear of the unknown, and the fear dissipates after a few soft landings in the sand or tanbark. For an adult, the fear of falling is linked to a fear of injury, medical expenses, and the possible loss of income – and, often, to other, deep concerns about their professional responsibilities and their families.

Many of the safety practices and routines you teach your adult students will be exactly the same ones that you teach

children. With adults, you will be able to go into much more detail and explain not just “how” and “when” to do something but also “why” and “what then.” These are all meaningful concepts to people who appreciate being taught theory as well as practice.

## Safety Skills

Emergency dismounts and pulley reins are just as useful for adults as they are for children. Explain what they are, teach all of your students how to use both, and teach them when and why these techniques would be appropriate. Express your strong hope that they will never need to employ these techniques, but be sure that they learn them anyway. Your child students will see them as great fun; your adult students will see them as valuable tools. If they learn, understand, and practice these skills, they will know that if an emergency situation called for the use of either technique, they would know what to do and how to do it. This knowledge will help them become more secure in their everyday riding.

## Fitness

Children, until recently, have had fewer issues with fitness; fitness has typically been much more of a concern for adults. Many adults will attempt to spend half their time apologizing for their weight and/or lack of fitness. Try not to allow this during lessons. In private, outside of class, you can provide riders with helpful advice about improving their fitness and – only if you are asked – with advice about achieving/maintaining a suitable weight for riding.

## Self Criticism

Adults tend to expect too much of themselves, and can be

very quick to decide that they have failed. It is usually possible to explain to adults why certain expectations are fair and why others are unrealistic and unfair. Make it clear that you, the instructor, must be the one who determines what can and cannot be asked or expected from each student.

## Learning Speed

Adults take longer than children to acquire the physical skills of riding. On the plus side, adults are generally more familiar with the concept of skills acquisition and typically do an excellent job of listening, learning and remembering.

## Taking The Long View

Adults are accustomed to working towards goals and making gradual progress, so they have little difficulty understanding the concept of the long view. Adults will work hard doing arena exercises because they can look ahead and see how the skills and techniques they are learning will apply later.

## Perseverance

Adults are typically very good at persevering – they have learned the hard way that efforts may result in failure many times before they bring

success. Unlike children, adults tend to be less concerned about failure in the moment as long as they feel that they are heading toward eventual success.

## Fun

Adults are often overwhelmed, not so much by the demands of their new sport but by the fact that they are finally doing something just for themselves. Some students may need help learning to relax and have fun. Others may need help in another way: You may have to teach them how to give themselves permission to have fun.

## Physical Problems

When teaching adults, plan to make some concessions to conditions you may encounter: injuries, illnesses, and chronic diseases. Invest in a tall, sturdy, four-step mounting block, and have all of your riders use it. Learn about any specific conditions and medications your students mentioned on their application forms. The more you understand about your students' limitations and their abilities, the better you will be able to plan their lessons and help them meet their riding goals.

When your students fill out their enrollment applications

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## Pat Maykuth, *continued from page 3*

market research firm for over 25 years. In that position that she coordinated the scientific Equine Exercise Physiology Studies that allowed horses to compete successfully in the heat and humidity of the 1996 Olympic Games.

Because Dr. Maykuth has always enjoyed galloping horses over fences, she has been aware of the inherent danger associated with this. Thus, she has made a substantial effort to understand conditioning, training, skill development and ways to reduce risk at home and in competition. Her most recent project has been spearheading the “Wake-up to Concussion” project. This effort established Return-to-Play criteria for riders who have experienced mild head injury. Pat joined the AMEA/SRF (now EMSA) board in 2004.

# Rider Development: The Core of Riding Safety

**S**afety and personal well-being are key concerns for any parent whose child begs to ride or for an adult seeking to take up riding. We have many historical images of earlier generations ranching or farming and living with horses. Television has exposed us to racing, rodeoing, jumping, reining and other current sports with horse. This olympic year the three equestrian disciplines were part of the summer Games. Yet most people have no everyday experience with this skittish, half-ton, grazing animal that would permit easy passage into the world of riding. Crossing the Rubicon requires an experienced, suitable animal and lots of practice.

The British Equestrian Federation<sup>1</sup> has produced a paper, "Long-term Athlete Development," that describes the essentials of developing elite riders that will represent the UK in international equestrian competitions. This well researched and science-based paper is informative to all who wish to ride. Although, the British Equestrian Federation is predominantly focused on the English style horse sports, the athlete training and development applies to all riding. Here are some of the highlights taken directly from this paper that define the basic training essential to all riders.

## Athlete Development

Research has shown that it takes a minimum of 10,000 hours of practice (not just engagement in) for an individual

*Summary by Pat Maykuth, PhD*

*For the full article by Colin Wilson, go to the British Equestrian Federation's web page, [http://www.bef.co.uk/Rider\\_Development\\_&\\_Coaching/Long\\_term\\_athlete\\_development.html](http://www.bef.co.uk/Rider_Development_&_Coaching/Long_term_athlete_development.html)*

to become expert in their chosen field of athletics. It's called the "10 year Rule". That is, 3 hours of practice a day for 10 years gets to the 10,000 hours. Olympians report 12 to 13 years of talent development from the introduction to the sport until making a team. Even if the Olympic dream is not part of your individual ambition, the basics of learning to ride are the same for all.

Getting started requires the development of athleticism. This includes agility, dynamic balance, coordination, special awareness, flexibility and basic endurance. The development of these skills may have been common place in the past, but in today's society children are spending less time on the playground and more in front of electronic media. Fitness and exercise levels of many young people are not sufficient to develop this basic physical literacy. If these skills are not developed, remedial work will be required later.

In late childhood, early adolescence and late adolescence there are optimal windows of trainability for: speed, motor skills, endurance, flexibility and strength associated with individual maturation for each gender. That is, there are periods of development in which the training of each of these specific capacities will have an optimal effect. Training in general athletics and riding specific skills should be planned with an understanding of this development. The core components of athleticism must be considered along with the demands of riding.

## Learning to Ride

Training in the initial stage includes physical, mental and technical components. Children

should be introduced to simple rules and ethics of the sport. Work should concentrate on increasing the rider's ability to control the speed and direction of the horse, develop body management and versatility. Attention to developing a feel for the horse, harmony rhythm and respect for the animal. The basic rules of horse care, equipment, etiquette around the barn and on property have to be mastered. In the beginning, the rider should spend 10 hours in physical activity per week (this would include 2-4 hours riding and 6-8 hours in other organized activity such as gymnastics, swimming and other physical athletics).

## Learning and Training to Ride

Learning and Training to Ride includes the safe development of technical riding foundations with confidence to maximize the motor training window of trainability. The rider's introduction to horse sport should promote involvement in multidisciplinary events. A fun approach to games and tasks that facilitate curiosity and exploration should be the focus of this phase. Work at this stage should concentrate on increasing the rider's ability to control the speed and direction of the horse with increased levels of versatility and confidence. Rider body management and versatility are more important than discipline specialization. Specialization too early can limit the rider's potential and activity choices.

In this phase of development the rider should develop a feel for rhythm, harmony and respect for the horse. Basic understanding of how to take care of a horse, the equipment and the culture of the chosen discipline are learned. Parti-

cipation in suitable competition should increase toward the end of this phase. Such competition should focus on fun, learning through positive experiences allowing the rider to experience success and failure. The success enables the rider to gain self confidence and encourage exploration while experience with failure enables the rider to learn persistence and coping skills. It is important that instructors and parents reactions to successes and failures present a positive developmental approach to both outcomes. Training should encourage competition, cooperation and teamwork among young riders.

## Training to Compete

Training to compete involves developing a competent rider and a competitor who enjoys and looks forward to competition. The paper continues to recommend a multidisciplinary approach to riding while developing mastery and understanding of the horse physiologically and mentally and how to develop the horse through training. The rider will develop knowledge and understanding of the riders "eye" for terrain, courses, surface and acuity. The continued enhancement of core fitness in addition specific riding skills will supplement the increase in competitive experience.

## Training to Win

Training to win involves the ability to perform consistently at the top of the sport with the capacity to peak both themselves and their horses for the major event. These are the preparations necessary to win at the national level and compete to international standards. The paper covers the Training to Win and Active for Life levels

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## Rider Development, *continued from page 5*

requisites in the same detail as the earlier levels.

### Safe Riding Essentials

The paper stresses the importance of appropriate fitness, essential skill development, riding practice and horse knowledge at every level. Support training activities that maximize aerobic, speed, endurance, flexibility and strength during critical periods is useful in developing core fitness components. The lack of the required levels of fitness will hold the rider back from developing their skills during the optimal development times. Riders must be able to complete the volume of training needed to develop skills and meet the specific de-

specific skills, equipment and information must be mastered and a level of “certification” of that mastery is essential for safe participation. You don’t just walk in one day and say “I think I’ll dive today” and expect a positive outcome. You have to learn about breathing through a mouthpiece even when surprised, afraid or stressed. Sailors and pilots have to learn to read the sky, water, wind, maps, charts and weather reports. Special training in what to do when the unexpected happens has to be engrained. Systematic skill development and training are required. The same is true for all types of riding. The rider has to establish core fitness, learn the skills required to sit a horse

the reins effectively, they have to spend unsupervised time interacting with the horse to have an idea of what behavior to expect in a variety of circumstances. Then they have to develop successful coping skills to address that behavior.

The paper on the long term development of international riders does much to inform us about realistic expectations and requirements for riders at all levels. Although focused on youth development, the lessons remain the same for riding at all ages.

- 1) Be sufficiently fit for your body to be able to learn the new riding related skills
- 2) Develop the core athleticism that al-

### Basic Requirements for Long-term Rider Development Schedules

Development	Active Start	Learning to Train	Training to Train	Training to Compete	Training to Win	Active for Life
Generic Athletics	1- 6 years	6-12 sex differences	11-16 sex differences	15-21 sex differences	21+	All ages
Riding		Sport specific† 3 x week	Sport specific 6- 9 x week	Sport specific 9-12 x week	Sport specific 9-15 x week	
Other Activity	Fundamentals 5-6 x week	3 other sports 3 x week	2 other sports per week	Participate in 1 other sport		
Objective	Physical Literacy	Safety Fun Enjoyment	Safety Learning Satisfaction	Safety Satisfaction Performance	Safety Satisfaction Performance	Safety Enjoyment Health
Horse Relationship	NA	Learn to care for	Learn to train	Train to compete	Train to win	Care for & train

†*Sport specific: technical, tactical and fitness*

mands of the sport. An appreciation for how emotional states impact performance and the need to establish the feel for the horses’ physical and emotional state are essential for sound rider development.

If we come to riding without having addressed the core component of athleticism, we start riding with a handicap. That handicap is exacerbated by insufficient knowledge of the horse’s nature. Lifelong horsewoman Gigi Winslet makes a valuable point about sports where the environment in which they are conducted is unnatural to us. Safety training and practice are critical to these activities. Diving, sailing, flying and riding are similar in that very little from our life experience or modeling carries over to inform how we must act in those environments. These are all activities where

and learn the enough about equine behavior to be able to read the situation.

Acquiring an understanding of horse behavior is requisite. Most of us did not grow up on a horse farm where we saw the animals interacting with each other in the pasture or being handled in all sorts of situations. Thus we do not have the history of what to expect from the horse, where it is apt to be spooky, what situations to avoid completely, what it will and won’t tolerate, etc. Nor do we have the experience of watching skilled horsemen for years to model their behavior. We have a dearth of knowledge about the horse when we are introduced to riding. Just as riders have to learn to hold the reins, they need instruction in how to behave around a horse. Just as riders have to practice holding and using

allows you to ride astride a horse, control direction and speed over a variety of terrain, surfaces and tasks.

- 3) Develop understanding and empathy with the horse to comprehend the physical and mental being
- 4) Learn the rules, etiquette and equipment of your chosen activity and develop those assets

Whether learning to ride for the first time, coming back to riding after some years or getting back on after a few months respite, preparation is the best way to reduce the risk of accidents. Your level of riding will never be higher than your level of fitness, skill development and experi-

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## Rider Development

*Continued from page 6*

ence. To maximize your riding enjoyment and minimize your chance of accident and injury, prepare well and realistically assess your status.

The information in the "Long-term Athlete Development" paper may exceed the riding aspirations of most. However, it gives an excellent perspective to enable riders to assess where they are in that development and what it will take to proceed to the next level. Learning to be a casual rider is no casual process. It makes clear that learning to ride at every level requires training, fitness, coaching, time, practice, and skill, well beyond any talent. Without this investment, riding will be a very dangerous activity. With systematic development, a rider in any activity can achieve those requisite riding and horse mastership skills necessary to participate in a lifetime of enjoyment of horses. This paper is a good roadmap for those interested in doing that.

## The Older Rider

*Continued from page 4*

and you ask for name, address, contact information, whom to notify in case of accident or emergency, and their doctor's name and number, don't stop there. Collect any medical information (e.g., allergies, illnesses, disabilities, chronic/acute conditions, and medications) that might affect your students' riding and your lesson plans.

### Absolute Beginners

Treat them like beginners. Be careful with them, teach them well, and give them a solid foundation. With adult students, you will need to explain what you are doing and why you are doing it, every step of the way.

### If They Are Coming Back To Riding

Treat them like beginners. Everything has changed since they last rode. Horse breeds, sizes, and energy levels, saddles and bridles, and safety equipment and practices are all different, and your students' bodies have changed, too. Treating returning riders like beginners will help you promote the best possible set of instructor values: Good, safe, sensible, progressive, ethical teaching that begins with a correct foundation and then builds on it. Take advantage of your adult students' capacity for understanding and their interest in riding theory – share your thoughts with them about the theory and practice of teaching riding. Adult students can provide you with unique teaching opportunities that will enable you to grow as an instructor.

Thank you for accepting the challenges and rewards of teaching adult riders. Your efforts will benefit the entire equestrian community.



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