

## Benefits of Horse Therapy

Depending on the disability, benefits of horseback riding include **improvement in joint mobility, balance and coordination, relaxation of spasticity, increased muscle tone, self-confidence through enhanced self-image, improved learning, concentration, spatial awareness, and motivation to set and achieve goals.** Riders also benefit emotionally, through the unique bonds they form with their horses and our incredibly dedicated volunteers. Most important is that riding a horse is fun! From the beginning, riders learn balance, coordination and self-assurance while receiving therapeutic muscle stimulation. As a result of carefully planned lessons, poise posture, strength and flexibility improve. A strong sense of responsibility develops as the rider learns to take part in the care of the horses and equipment.

- Someone who is unable to participate in other athletics can now participate in equine games and sports.
- A person who can't walk gains legs and one who is small now has higher view of life while on horseback.
- The immediate gratification of independence and control is accomplished in the therapeutic riding arena.

Riders are encouraged to participate as much as they can in grooming, saddling, and guiding the horse. Praise and encouragement are constant from the volunteers. Every success is acknowledged, no matter how small.

Additional benefits for the riders while participating in therapy riding classes include: **strengthening cognitive and sequential thinking, problem solving, confidence and self esteem building, exposure to positive role models and mentors, and movement toward achieving individual goals set by schools and therapists.**

**Therapeutic riding also promotes socialization.** Instructors, therapists, volunteers, parents and riders get together. Often the social interaction becomes as important as the riding lesson. Friendships are made, acceptable behaviors are reinforced and unacceptable behaviors are discouraged. A human-animal bond develops between riders and their therapy horses as riders discover that the horses are gentle, friendly, accepting, and do not see disabilities.

Disability	Benefits of Therapeutic Riding
ADD/ADHD	Enhances memory, sequential thinking, concentration, uses mental/physical/tactile skills to focus attention on horse/rider team.
Autism	Physical and verbal activity helps to focus awareness on other people and the horses.
Cerebral Palsy	Physical activity helps with balance, posture, and motion in the joints. Interactive speech uses thought and physical processes.
Developmentally Delayed	Riders are applauded for each success, provides a great alternative sport, helps with social and physical development.
Downs Syndrome	Helps with self-esteem, use of fine and gross motor skills, thought processing and speech, physical exercise tones muscles, helps with posture and balance.
Emotional Disability	Riders are given sincere encouragement, helps with self-esteem, builds self-confidence, must concentrate outside of self to develop horse management skills.
Eye Disorder	Physically enhances gross and fine motor control, develops muscles and symmetry. Requires attention to sequencing, thought process, communication skills.
Head Injury	Rebuilds physical/mental skills, improves, posture, balance, fine and motor skills.
Learning Disability	Enhances skills needed to learn, sequential thinking, eye-hand coordination, attention span, physical skills strengthens balance, fine and gross motor skills. Interaction with horse, staff and other riders uses language skills.
Multiple Sclerosis	Provides an individualized recreational program, social stimulation, physically enhances muscles and balance.
Speech Disorders	Enhances skills needed for communication with other people and the horses in alternative sport activity. Builds self-esteem in caring environment.
Stroke	Helps to re-acquire symmetrical use of body, strengthens muscles, balance, motor skills and improves speech processes.
Traumatic Brain Injury	Provides caring atmosphere to try new skills and interact with people and horses. Physically helps with balance, motor skills and posture. Mentally requires use of perception, sequencing, and speech processes.