PORT MACQUARIE
HORSE RIDING CENTRE

The downside to horse riding: Falling off & getting back on again

Horse riding is a rewarding and thrilling sport. When learning new skills and working with animals, there are inherent risks that can make learning to ride and interact with horses dangerous.

Our job is to make a risky sport as safe as we can while providing our customers with a skill-building experience. We endeavour to provide skill-appropriate activities for each customer based on their level of ability, athleticism, natural balance, riding goals and learning style.

Part of this job also includes preparing clients for the not-so-fun possibility of falling off and informing them about the process.

Sometimes things can go wrong.

Sometimes, horses can react to external and environmental factors that can make them move suddenly, or act unpredictably. On occasion, our riders may be exposed to these natural behaviours, even when working with our very quiet team of horses.

It is very easy to fall off / slip off / lose your balance even at walk.

So, what happens if you fall off?

First, rest assured, we are all first-aid trained. We will make sure our rider is safe, assess for any physical injuries and treat minor abrasions. We may ask for permission to call an ambulance or call one on your behalf. There is no need to feel alarmed if we offer to call an ambulance; this is the best and safest practice if a rider falls. We will suggest visiting the hospital even if there are only minor injuries or complaints of pain.

Excluding horses, my own daughter broke her wrist tripping over a tennis ball, so it goes to show that injuries can happen anywhere. We are always cautious in our approach if there is a suspected injury.

Falling off can be a shock. This may provoke an emotional response, and a fall can cause pain and injury. A fall can alter our perception of horse riding, knocking our confidence and trust in horses and horse-riding activities. A fall may turn one rider away from the sport, while another rider may not have their confidence knocked at all. Every rider is different.

I have worked with riders who have had a great run at riding over several years and have not experienced one fall. Then, there may be an accident that leaves them in the sand, and this can be a challenging experience for one rider to overcome, while the next is happily back in the saddle the following day.

What next?

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The adage "get straight back on the horse" is outdated and does not apply in our space.

We care deeply about our riders' safety and welfare; we will check in after a fall. We also care about how our riders feel about returning to riding. We will work with each rider and make a low-key return-to-riding plan that suits the individual. Rebuilding confidence and trust can take time—more time for some riders than others. We are here for the journey and will go at your pace.

How can we prep our little people for the risks associated with our great sport?

Speaking to your child about the risks is important. Falling off can happen to anyone in our sport, and we should talk about this possibility openly, so they are prepared for it. How might they feel if they fall off? Some of our little people have not experienced pain or injury before. Falling can cause shock and may cause pain. Reassure them that it is very unlikely they will constantly fall off, but they might at some stage. Chatting about how it might make them feel at the time and afterwards can help our little ones feel informed and prepared. Providing reassurance that we will make a safe plan for them when the time comes to hop back on is also comforting.

We also ensure our riders are wearing up to date helmets, appropriate footwear and clothing. You can check the most up to date helmet standards here:

https://www.equestrian.org.au/content/current-approved-safety-standards-helmets

What about insurance and any accident-related expenses?

Ambulance cover alone, or personal rider insurance is strongly recommended.

You can find out about ambulance cover here:

https://www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/our-services/accounts-and-fees/ambulance-coverage-if-you-are-a-nsw-resident

You can become a member of Equestrian Australia here:

https://www.equestrian.org.au/Membership

The EA National Insurance Scheme, provided by Gow Gates Insurance Brokers, offers members 24/7 Personal Accident and Public Liability Insurance at all times while engaged in non-income-earning equestrian activities. For policy details and additional product packages available to members, please visit the Gow Gates Insurance website.

We hope this information helps you understand the risks associated with Equestrian activities. We look forward to working with you on your equestrian journey.