

Therapeutic Horseback riding

Believe it or not, but the movement of a horse's hips and pelvis is often used to facilitate people with physical disabilities in gaining and building up musculoskeletal and motor responses. As the horse moves, the rider is constantly thrown off balance and is therefore required to be flexible, and contract or relax muscles in an attempt to re-balance and remain in the saddle. This unconventional and often controversial treatment is part of a strategy that utilizes equine movement, and is recognized as hippotherapy. It is only one of the many benefits recreational horseback riding can have on people with disabilities.

Equine Assisted Activity or therapeutic horseback riding is sometimes also called adaptive riding and is geared towards individuals with specific physical, emotional, cognitive, and social disabilities. During therapeutic riding, a certified riding instructor will teach disabled people of all ages actual riding skills. However, not only the riding itself, but the entire equine environment can be beneficial, and help participating individuals develop abilities, such as leadership, companionship, responsibility, vocational and educational skills, as well as friendly competition, once their riding skill have advanced.

The advantages of horseback riding are as numerous as the types of disabilities and conditions it can serve. Equine assisted therapy can be helpful to amputees, or those suffering from conditions such as autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, mental retardation, muscular dystrophy, Spina Bifida, or those who may be visually or hearing impaired.

Horseback riding can offer a great workout for both the human body and mind. Many individuals with mental and emotional disabilities, who are able to care for, or ride a horse, will be able to form a unique relationship with the animal. This will help increase their confidence, patience, and self-esteem. Additionally, riders with physical disabilities benefit from the horse's gentle and rhythmic moves, which are similar to a human gait. The exercise will not only be enjoyable, but will also increase the rider's flexibility, balance and strengthen his or her muscles.

Developing a relationship and sense of trust with a horse is highly rewarding, and being able to ride it is an even bigger achievement. If that is not therapeutic enough, add the advantages of being outdoors, and the enjoyment of being in a different environment, and you will soon realize how beneficial this kind of treatment really is.

About the Author

[CroSci](#) is a non-government organisation which fosters science, technology and education development through a network of free online resources.

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