

Horse Riding

If you are not a regular horse rider, after just an hour of riding you will feel muscles aching that you did not even know existed. That means that although you may not necessarily break out in a sweat and huff and puff whilst riding, you are still exercising. It is good to know it is not only the horse that is working and it is not only fools that go with horses.

Horse riding is an excellent form of exercise, improving cardiovascular fitness as well as having muscle-conditioning benefits. An hour on horseback can burn similar calories to that of a 30-minute jog (6mph) or cycle ride (9mph). The reason why you feel your muscles ache after a ride is due to the movement of the horse and its affect on the rider during the ride. As the rider reacts to the horse's movements to avoid becoming off balance, the deep postural muscles of the trunk and pelvis and the adductor muscles of the thighs are continuously being conditioned.

A summary of the Countryside Recreation Network, who looked at the Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise, state: - "it seems that the presence of living things makes us feel good. They help us when we feel stressed, and if there is green vegetation, blue sky and water in the scene, then we like it even more."

The World Health Organisation estimates that depression and depression-related illness will become the greatest source of ill-health by 2020. Horse riding is one way of actively participating and having involvement with nature and a fantastic stress reliever. Think about riding through a quiet forest or galloping over a field, taking in the views of the great outdoors - a great feeling of freedom and exhilaration.

The psychological benefits can be as important as the physical benefits. Horse riding is recognised as having excellent therapeutic qualities and is often used as therapy for disabled children.

Horse riding is an activity for all ages and abilities, allowing some to take it up as a competitive sport whilst others simply find it a wonderful way to relax and enjoy the countryside.

It is rewarding for children to develop relationships and a sense of trust between them and a horse. It also helps them to learn to respect and care for an animal. All of this can have a profound affect on their self confidence.

Too often horse riding is seen as a sport for the rich and famous. The good news is that you do not need to own a horse and all the gear to get started. There are numerous riding schools throughout the UK that can provide training or even just the odd one off ride. Most importantly the schools will be able to offer you a suitable horse to ride on. If you are a complete beginner most schools will require that you first have a private lesson with a tutor. When you achieve a safe and comfortable standard you will be able to join a group class. The first lessons are usually in an enclosed area such as a riding pen. You will be taught basic riding skills, such as how to get on and off the horse, how to hold the reins, how to sit correctly, how to walk and trot, and the signals you need to use to guide, steer and stop the horse. The riding school will also provide you with a very important piece of equipment – a safety hat.

It is not necessary to buy expensive riding gear. All you will need is a pair of comfortable trousers, not jeans, which aren't too baggy and a pair of shoes with a smooth sole.

The average price for a riding lesson varies from £20 to £30 per hour.