

SO HOW DOES IT WORK?

The results are clear...

But have you ever been asked to explain how they happened?

How does riding improve balance?

The horse provides a comfortable base of support upon which a person who is unstable on his/her own legs can learn to balance. Riding is a dynamic movement activity. The movement of the horse gently shifts the rider off balance and back to the centre facilitating rhythmical contraction and relaxation of the muscles in the body. Changes in the horse's movement, direction or pace grades the degree to which the rider's balance is challenged.

How does riding improve muscle strength?

Pleasure in riding provides incentive to repeat and persist with otherwise boring exercises. Many activities on or associated with the horse can be used to promote strength and endurance.

How does riding improve co-ordination skills?

Successful horse riding involves every part of the body working in constantly changing combinations of movements. Therefore it is the coordination of every part of the body that is challenged when the rider moves with and controls the horse. On a horse postural background and gross motor skills are emphasized in support of refining fine motor and other skills.

How is riding is good exercise?

Some people with disabilities have difficulty finding physical recreational activities that offer the quality of exercise that riding provides. Horse-riding may be their only source of continuous activity and regular exercise that they can participate in. Riding involves all of the muscles of the body and in addition stimulates all the body systems. It can also be a relaxing activity as it is enjoyable activity that encourages active muscle work and deep breathing.

How does riding facilitate the relaxation of **high** muscle tone...

High muscle tone prevents a person from initiating co-ordinated movements of the body. Relaxation facilitates improved balance, posture and co-ordination. The continuous, smooth, rhythmical movement of the horse promotes this relaxation. The natural warmth of the horse also facilitates stretching and careful positioning helps to inhibit any reflexes that may be present.

... or normalise low muscle tone?

The strong dynamic movement of the horse provides proprioceptive and vestibular input that effectively facilitates an increase in low muscle tone. The up and down movement enhances joint approximation and contraction of the deep postural muscles. Changing the horse's tempo and direction as well as doing exercises on the horse combine this natural impact of the horse's movement with functional activities.

How does riding improve posture?

Horse riding gives symmetrical exercise to the body in response to the horse's movement. Muscles on either side of the spine are exercised equally promoting good postural alignment. Tactile input received through the base of the spine while sitting astride a horse also naturally facilitates an upright posture. In addition, the activities used in the program help to improve trunk control and balance and therefore increase the strength and endurance of the postural muscles.

How does riding improve gait (walking ability)?

The horse as a modality for gait training has no equal counterpart. No apparatus has been developed to replicate the unimpeded, repetitive motions the horse imparts to a rider. The movement of the horse causes the riders pelvis, trunk and shoulder girdle to react in ways very similar to those produced by the human walk. Automatic weight shifts occur in the rider in response to the horse's movement, which is an important sensation for riders with asymmetrical weight bearing patterns. The horse is also invaluable in providing the feeling of proper stride length.

How does riding improve communication skills?

To communicate people need to learn the basic aspects of communication: speech, facial expressions, body language, signing and gesture. They also need appropriate opportunities (an attentive listener who responds to them), reasons (they make requests, ask questions, give information and share their feelings) and the confidence to express themselves. Riders learn basic commands to get their horse to go and stop. The horse willingly responds to their instructions and therefore provides the positive reinforcement that motivates them to continue to make their requests.

How does riding improve social skills?

Bonding with a horse assists in bonding with humans because the horse becomes a friend to interact with, care for and develop a partnership with. The horse will accept a rider with no prejudice. The horse will tolerate behaviour from a rider that humans find difficult to accept. It immediately returns kindness and affection and willingly responds to the rider's requests. Also, learning to control the horse encourages the rider to control themselves and they become motivated to follow the instructions, cooperate, take turns, share and abide by the rules which are important social skills developed through riding. Children and adults can actively rehearse these and are rewarded by the horse's response.

How does riding improve concentration?

Inattention is probably the most common reason for a child not achieving their full potential. An incentive to concentrate and achieve is provided by horse's willing response to the rider's instructions and success in something can be guaranteed.

Many children have an arousal level that is greater or lesser than the optimum. The horse's movement can be graded to stimulate attention to a specific activity by either elevating or reducing the rider's level of arousal.

How does riding improve perceptual motor skills?

Perceptual motor learning involves all the senses i.e. sight, hearing, touch etc. Perception is the recognition of this sensory information. We use this information to organize, memorize, acquire knowledge, make judgments and problem solve. The riding environment, by its very nature, facilitates a multi-sensory approach. Riders actively participate in functional activities which motivate them to accept and explore the sensations and concepts presented during their sessions.

How does riding improve self-confidence?

Riding must be one of the few activities where people can achieve instant success, they get it right and the horse responds. This motivates them to try again and gradually their confidence grows. Riders are also empowered by the sense of control they have over a horse, by mastering skills and achieving their goals. This gives their self-esteem an incredible boost.

Horses put the FUN back into FUNction !