

Tips on Safe Handling of Horses

Our topics for this week are

- **The most common type of injury from handling horses**
- **The most common fatal injury from handling horses**
- **Some steps to minimize the risks of common injuries from handling horses**

Nothing lifts my and Ginger's spirits as much as being around our horses. They are beautiful, smart, athletic animal that have shaped the development of civilization. Unfortunately few people have much quality experiences in handling them and too many underestimate how dangerous horses can be if not handled properly.

To better understand the risk of injury from handling horses, consider that they are 5 to 15 times larger, 20 to 40 times more powerful, and 3 to 4 times faster than humans. If a rider falls to the ground, it is 3 ½ to 5 ½ feet, possibly head first. Horseback riding is the only sport where a weak predator, such as a human, tries to impose its will on and become one unit of movement with a much larger, stronger prey animal with a mind of its own, such as a horse.

No license is required to handle or ride a horse. Yet, horseback riding has a greater injury rate than riding a motorcycle, which does require a license. Typically an injury occurs after riding 7,000 hours on a motorcycle and after just 350 hours riding a horse.

Types of Injury

Head trauma is the injury that most people think of, sometimes the exclusive injury. Head injuries are feared and wearing of equine helmets are recommended. Concern is justified because head and neck injuries are reason for ¾ of deaths from equine accidents. Female riders aged 25-44 have 2.5 times the risk of head and neck injury compared to men. This may be related to the popularity of jumping events and barrel racing among females; Fatalities from head and neck injuries are also higher in senior riders over 50 years of age.

Among the more common non-fatal injuries, horse-related hand injuries are the third most common cause of recreational hand injuries, following ball sports and cycling. Most hand injuries from handling horses, not riding falls. Over half of hand injuries from horses are related to lead ropes, longeing lines, and bridles. Being efficient at tying the proper knots and hitches is

very important, as is line and rein management in handling horses. Thirty percent of hand injuries are from a fall from riding and 10 to 15% are from bites. The fingers are most affected in nearly 90% of cases. Half involve fractures and 20-25% result in partial to complete amputation. Roping from horseback involves dallying (wrapping) the rope around the saddle horn. When dallying, the thumb should be pointed up to prevent entrapment and amputation if it gets caught in the wraps. This is a common risk when team roping where one person ropes a cow's horns and another ropes its hind legs.

Other less common causes of injury are kicks, being stepped on, getting a foot caught in a stirrup, being bitten, and being trampled.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Hand injuries are the most common injury from handling horses**
- 2. Head and neck injuries are the most common fatal injuries caused by handling horses.**
- 3. Knowing how to efficiently tie knots and hitches and manage reins, ropes, and longe lines are especially important for handling horses from the ground.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 350 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.