



Equestrian Helmets: What Do I Need to Know?

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Horseback riding has one of the highest injury rates of all sports—including football! The major reason is that in contrast to other sports, only 20% of horse riders wear protective headgear every time they ride, and more than 40% of riders never wear a helmet.

Many riders don't wear helmets because they "ride a quiet horse," "don't ride fast," or "don't ride competitively." Recent studies indicate that these excuses are not only false, but dangerous. If you ride a horse, you are at risk of head injury.

The good news is, head injuries are preventable—if you wear a protective helmet. Protective helmets are padded inside to protect you from concussion, and their outer shell cannot be pierced by most sharp objects.

So, no excuses...wear a helmet!

Douglas A. Hart, Extension agent, Columbia County; Oregon State University.



Western helmet



English velvet helmet

Which helmet should I choose?

Choose a helmet that fits your riding style. Helmets are now available in western, velvet, and club designs.

In the past, equestrian helmets often were hot, heavy, and difficult to fit. The new styles offer many or all of the following features:

- good ventilation
- improved fit (using adjustable sizing pads similar to bicycle helmets)
- removable, washable inner liner
- less bulky, more streamlined profile

- variety of covers (western, lycra, English velvet) to fit one helmet
- quick safety-release chin fastening
- optional under-chin or point-chin fastening

Be sure your helmet is ASTM F 1163-88 approved with SEI certification. Look for the label attached to the inside cover. Beware! Not all helmets meet these safety standards.

Hard shell vs. soft shell

The essential part of the helmet providing impact protection is a thick inner layer of firm styrofoam, or polysty-

rene. Both hard-shell and soft-shell helmets have this inner layer. The main difference between them is that hard-shell helmets have a hard outer shell of plastic or fiberglass that provides a shield over the head by spreading the impact over the entire helmet, while soft-shell helmets have a thin plastic outer shell, and weigh less.

The lighter soft-shell helmet may be appropriate for young children whose neck muscles are still developing and cannot support the weight of hard helmets. Both helmet styles have passed the ASTM/SEI tests.





Hard-shell helmet

How should a helmet fit?

Your helmet should fit as snugly as you can comfortably wear it. As a general rule, it should stay on when you bend over and shake your head from side to side. Many newer-style helmets have fitting pads similar to bicycle helmets.

Where can I buy a helmet?

Helmets are available by mail order (e.g., National 4-H Catalog), direct from the factory, or from your local tack shop.

Some mail order companies offer a discount purchase program. For more information, contact:
Dovers, (800) 343-4626

Frank & Sons Inc.,
(516) 281-1283

Troxel Inc., (619)
429-1444

Vision International
Inc. (206) 382-1283

For further reading

In the *Get Under the Safety Umbrella* series:

Riding on the Road,
4-H 13002. No charge.

Trailer Your Horse,
4-H 13003. No charge.



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