

Evidence for the benefits of interaction with Horses

In 2011, the British Horse Society (BHS) commissioned the University of Brighton in partnership with Plumpton College to evaluate the health and well-being benefits of horse-based sport and leisure. The full study can be found online: <http://www.bhs.org.uk/enjoy-riding/health-benefits>

The paper, *The Health Benefits of Riding in the UK*, British Horse Society, 2011, documents the results of the research and previous studies, and cites the many physical and psychological benefits of horse riding and care, including:

Riding and horse care

- Horse care and riding is classed as 'moderate intensity' exercise (the government recommends at least 150 minutes each week to keep healthy)
- Stimulates feelings of well-being, relaxation and happiness
- Increases self-esteem and provides motivation to take care of yourself
- Alleviates depression and anxiety through interaction with nature and being outdoors
- Improves symptoms of chronic ill health, including relieving pain and discomfort
- Improves posture and muscle strength, particularly in people with physical disabilities
- Improves confidence and self-perception in children with cerebral palsy
- Increases people's social, occupational and psychological functioning
- Decreases behavioural problems in children

Equine facilitated learning

The research found that psychological benefits are provided even if the riders did not participate long enough to obtain physical health benefits.

A number of respondents referred to the positive impact of horse riding on mental illnesses, with a number of participants describing how caring for horses and horse riding had motivated them to get better and been an important contributor to their recovery.

The BHS report findings tended to support existing studies on the use of equine assisted therapy which show:

- The improved physical conditioning of both adults and children with specific physical disabilities (Crane, 1999; Bertoli, 1988; Bronson et al 2010)
- Significant improvements in confidence, self-perception and motivation in children with cerebral palsy (Mackinnon, 1995)
- An increase in people's social, occupational and psychological functioning (Schultz et al, 2007)
- A decrease in behavioural problems in children (Kaiser et al, 2006)

Other useful links

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