

CONDITIONING

"Conditioning" is the process of getting you and your horse fit to do more work and at a faster pace without getting tired. You both build muscles and are less likely to hurt yourselves if when you get tired or your horse gets into a bad spot.

When conditioning your horse, you must know how much he is able to do at one time.

- You don't want to overdo your horse because will break down muscle instead of build muscle.
- You also need to know if your pony is unhealthy or unsound. You can make the injury or sickness much worse if you work a unhealthy or lame horse.
- When you are working to get your horse fit, you need to make sure he stays sound. Too much strain on his legs when he's not ready can make him lame.
- Every time you ride you must warm him up gradually, and cool him out carefully.
- As you work your horse, his vital signs go up. The fitter your pony is the quicker the pony's vital signs go back down.
 - Before you ride, take your pony's temperature, pulse and respiration. This will be his vital sign "at rest."
 - Then work him, and record his signs right when you get off "after work."
 - After you cool him out, record the vital signs again, and record how long it took for your horse's vital signs to return back to normal.
 - This will help you determine how fit your horse is at each stage of your conditioning schedule.
- When cooling your horse out after a gallop or hard work, you don't just dump buckets of cold water, or hose him off right away with cold water, this is very hard on horses muscle and circulatory system.
 - Walk him in large ovals until his breathing has reduced to almost normal. Hose/sponge him off with lukewarm water starting at his legs and working your way up to his neck, then hind quarters, and then put water on his back last.

Remember, the conditioning that you and your horse do depends on your horse and what level you are going to be competing at or how long you will be riding him in a stressful environment. You don't want to get him too fit for what he is going to do or he will be too hot to handle. So use your judgement for the amount to work you and your horse do. Make sure you cool down your horse after you ride. For every hour that you are conditioning your horse, you will need to think about conditioning yourself as well by running, swimming, lifting weights, eating regularly, getting enough sleep, walking hills, etc. so that you have the stamina to compete as well.

CONDITIONING FOR DRESSAGE

Regular riding for one to two hours a day for six days a week is enough to get your pony fit for showing lower level dressage. Remember to allow time for adequate walking before for warming up the large dressage horse muscles and long walk time after your work to cool down those very

warm bulky muscles. Walking outside relaxes the horses and reduces boredom for the dressage horses. Upper level dressage horses also need to do some hill work to develop their gaskin and hindquarter muscles for the sitting and the transitions required for the collection work (Second Level and above).

You want to work on controlling his rhythm, balance, and bending. Do lots of up and down transitions. You want to make sure he works in a good frame, flexing and bending at the poll. Do correct schooling figures at the walk, trot, and canter in this frame to work on accuracy and communication of aids. Work on incorporating transitions within the gait to develop elastic, strong muscles. Note: All of these without your horse fighting.

CONDITIONING FOR SHOW JUMPING

When conditioning for show jumping, you want to do the same as the dressage conditioning, but with more trot work. The trot really builds your horses' muscles and gets him fit. You also will need to jump your horse. Only jump about three times a week so that you don't make him lame. On the other days concentrate on your dressage, transitions, communication, etc.

Warm up on the flat and then jump a cross rail both directions a few times, then decide what kind of jumping work you are going to concentrate on that day. Grids are a good way to get your horse to use his shoulders over the jump and to get fit. They're also a fun way to work your position and timing on your horse! Start out with low jumps and then build up to higher jumps throughout your conditioning schedule until you're at the height that you're going to jump in competition. Repetitive athletic work develops more muscle and correctness in riders and horses than jumping lots of high jump. Remember to work on getting your horse straight so that he will jump at the take off target and in the middle of jumps in a line.

CONDITIONING FOR EVENTING

When conditioning for Eventing, you must remember that you are conditioning your horse for three separate but integrated sports. You should do dressage work five to six times per week – incorporating it into all aspects of your conditioning and show jumping training. Dressage needs to be practiced in an arena, out in the pasture or field, going up and down hills - especially at the trot.

Start jumping little coups and logs and work your way up to what you will see at the competitions. Like the show jumping, only jump about three times a week. Make sure your warm up is a sufficient amount of time before you start your jumping.

Do a lot of walking and trotting up and down hills to build up his stamina. When you are showing, you and your horse will be galloping for most of a full cross-country course. YOU and your horse need to be fit enough to last from morning until bedtime. This includes: caring for your horse, through grooming and tacking, to warm-up, the course, then to cooling your horse down, properly putting him away, cleaning your tack, feeding and bedding his stall, then through walking and checking on him before you go to bed for the evening. The endurance day is a long tiring day for you and your horse if you are not fit enough to last the entire day of caring for you and your horse.