

## Hot Weather Riding Tips

*The sunny days of summer bring extended daylight hours and the clear weather that means more opportunities to ride outdoors. But some summer days are so hot and humid that they rightly cause us concern over the potential for heat-related health consequences—in our horses and in ourselves.*

How much heat is too much to ride your horse? What can you do to keep your temperature regulated while working in the barn or riding? Here are some suggestions for preparing you and your horse to deal with high summer temperatures.

### For The Rider

Wear light-colored apparel when you're working around the barn or riding outside. Light colors reflect sunlight. Dark colors absorb sunlight, so when you wear them, you'll feel hotter. Another benefit of wearing light-colored clothing, particularly if you ride on trails, is that you can more easily spot ticks crawling on your clothes before they have an opportunity to attach to your skin.

Our bodies perspire as part of a cooling process. To keep yourself feeling cooler and drier, look for summer riding apparel in a variety of technical fabrics that allow your skin to breathe. Look for fabrics that offer temperature or moisture management by wicking perspiration away from your skin. Coolmax is such a fabric, and it is found in many articles of clothing from many manufacturers, including Tailored Sportsman, Equine Couture, TuffRider and more. Similar fabrics are Airmax, which is found in the Riding Sport line, Cooltex in the Kerrits clothing line and Dri-Lex in the Ovation clothing line.

On top, consider shirts such as the Kerrits Ventilator Pocket Shirt in fun patterns in both short-sleeve or sleeveless styles, or the Riding Sport Competition Shirt, also in fun colors and a breathable, lightweight fabric. For temperature control that lasts up to six hours, the Cool Medics V-Neck Vest is another option. It uses water and a highly advanced system of fabrics to provide a long-lasting cooling effect.

On the bottom, many riders favor riding tights for summer riding. They're made of very lightweight and stretchy technical fabrics, and are available in both knee patch and full seat styles. Consider tights from Kerrits, Irideon, Romfh, Devon-Aire and Riding Sport for the ultimate in comfort. Breeches such as the Ovation Ultra DX Breeches and Equine Couture Coolmax Champion

breeches are just two of the many examples of breeches that are designed to help keep you stylishly comfortable for schooling or showing.

Even socks and gloves are available with wicking benefits. Ovation Coolmax Zocks are popular for riders who wear tall boots or half chaps, as they keep the entire calf and foot comfortable. Lightweight gloves from several manufacturers are specifically designed for summer riding. Examples include the Heritage Summer Trainer Glove, which offers ventilation and a unique terry cloth thumb for perspiration, and the Tredstep Summer Cool Glove in a lightweight and breathable fabric. Traditional crochet back gloves are still an affordable, perennial summer favorite too!

Most styles of helmets have built-in ventilation features to help keep you comfortable. Samshield helmets have a discreet ventilation system that allows air to enter the front of the helmet and exit the back; other brands provide ventilation holes and air panels.

### For Your Horse

Calculate and consider the heat index on any summer day that you plan your ride. The heat index will give you a good guideline to establish for working your horse.

Temperature + Humidity = Heat Index

Humidity represents the percentage of moisture saturating the air. You can find out the humidity percentage (and often the heat index itself) from your local weather reports. Many reports include this information as a matter of course once a heat wave settles in.

Example calculations:

70° F + 35% humidity = 105  
(Pleasant sporting conditions)  
95° F + 85% humidity = 180  
(Dangerous conditions for physical exertion)

Horses seem to prefer to work in mild conditions, such as 65° F with a low humidity of perhaps 40%. (Just think of a horse's playfulness on a crisp spring or dry autumn day.)

## Water!

Drink plenty of water—your body needs it to function properly. You lose moisture constantly through exhaling as well as perspiring, so you should sip water continually throughout the day. Many people aim to drink 8 eight ounce glasses of water per day to combat dehydration.

Don't wait until you feel your mouth becoming dry to begin to drink, and watch for other signs of dehydration such as headache, hunger and fatigue. Beverages containing caffeine and lots of sugar will not help you remain hydrated.

If you become uncomfortably overheated, put a towel soaked with cold water on the back of your neck, or run cold water on the inside skin on your wrists.

So it is up to us to make sure we don't overtax our horses on very hot days.

In combination with the heat index, consider your horse's fitness level and condition. If your horse is fit and trim, has no serious respiratory or medical concerns and has been working regularly as your summer season set in, then he will be fairly well equipped to be worked appropriately on a hot day. Include lots of walk breaks during your ride with time for your horse's breathing to return to a normal rate.

### Related Topics

[How to Use Equine Vital Signs](#)  
[Tips for Trailing](#)

**For more assistance or to request a catalog, call 1-800-989-1500 to speak with a Dover Saddlery product advisor, or stop by any of our retail stores.**

**Visit [DoverSaddlery.com](http://DoverSaddlery.com) for a complete store listing and full product offering.**

## Hot Weather Riding Tips

Conversely, if your horse only works sporadically, or if he is old, overweight, coming back from an injury, has a serious medical condition or has just transferred into your area from a cooler region, then you might skip riding on the hottest of summer days. Even a trail ride could cause a compromised horse to become overheated.

**Note:** If you have questions about your horse's ability to work in warm weather, or the extent to which he should work, be sure to discuss your concerns with your horse's veterinarian.

Some riding academies and programs set a heat index guideline for their horses, and you could do the same for your horse given his condition. The United States Pony Club recommends that a horse not be worked at all when the heat index is 180 or higher. Exercise caution working in a heat index of 150 to 180. If you're a pleasure rider on an older horse, you may want to stick to walking only at a heat index of 140.

Like us, horses perspire to cool themselves. As perspiration dries, the horse becomes cooler. This process is why horses—and riders—have a difficult time cooling down when the humidity level is high. The moisture in the air prevents sweat from drying. But horses, with their large muscle masses, struggle even more than we do to cool down in high humidity. In an effort to cool himself, a horse will continue to perspire more, and the cycle continues unless you intervene. In severe cases, a horse can become overheated and a veterinarian may need to be called.

To help your horse cool down after your hot weather ride, sponge or hose him with water while scraping him off with a sweat scraper constantly. Continue the process until the water that comes off your horse is normal temperature (meaning the horse is not staying so hot as to heat the water). Scrape excess water from your horse and then walk him until he is dry rather than stabling him while wet. Doing so could cause your horse to heat up again in the confined space as the water tries to evaporate. Wet legs also set up conditions for the skin ailment known as scratches to develop. If your horse's legs are still damp after walking, be sure to dry them with a towel.

Coolers and anti-sweat sheets aren't appropriate to use in hot weather as they can prevent a horse from cooling off; they're designed to help a horse cool down without getting chilled during cold weather.

Provide plenty of fresh, clean water to entice your horse to drink. Horses like water that is cool, and are not naturally attracted to water that sits in the sun where it can become too hot to be appealing. Watch for signs of dehydration in your horse using the pinch test and more reliable capillary refill time. See "How to Use Equine Vital Signs."

Horses lose salt through perspiration. If your horse works (and sweats) heavily in summer, speak with your veterinarian or your trainer about whether your horse should receive an electrolyte mixture or one or two ounces of salt added to his grain. Always provide a free choice salt block, though for some horses in heavy training this salt source may not provide enough salts to replenish the lost supply. Himalayan salt licks are the most popular, but you can choose from a variety of forms—plain or with minerals—according to your horse's preference and needs.

Other things that you can do to keep your horse happy in his summer work include riding early in the morning, before the heat and humidity of a summer day settles in like a blanket. If you have to truck your horse anywhere, again try to do so in cooler hours of the day. Remember that a traffic jam can be dangerous for your horse as the trailer can heat up rapidly at a standstill on hot pavement.

Dress your horse in a light-colored saddle pad that reflects sunlight, just as you wear light-colored clothing yourself. Saddle pads with wicking properties that move moisture away from your horse's skin can help him feel more comfortable. Consider the Rambo Newmarket Handy Saddle Pad with cool-dry lining and the Rider's Waffle Flo Pad, which is highly breathable.

Wash your saddle pads frequently, if not after every ride. Washing will help your pads maintain their loft and cushioning for a soft and healthy surface against your horse's

## Summer Showing

Many show jackets and show shirts are made of technical fabrics that keep competitors cool and comfortable while riding. Jackets from Animo, Grand Prix and GPA made of breathable, lightweight fabrics with wicking properties move moisture away from the body. Look for shirts containing CoolMax, such as those from Tailored Sportsman, Essex Classics and Beacon Hill. Breeches come in a variety of fabrics with wicking properties, too. Finish your show ensemble with summer weight gloves and socks that contain CoolMax.

skin. Clean saddle pads also help to preserve the leather of your saddle by minimizing its exposure to the drying salts resulting from sweat.

If your horse wears protective boots, consider choosing some that are designed with ventilation to prevent the buildup of excessive heat. For example, Dalmar Eventer Boots feature a patented cooling system that uses high speed cold air hitting the front of the horses' leg to pass through the boot and cool the horse's tendons while galloping.

Spray your horse with fly repellent. It will help fight off flies that could cause your horse to stomp or worse run to escape them, which in turn could cause him to overheat. If your horse wears a fly sheet, monitor his comfort in it against the heat index. Some horses do just fine in fly sheets at any temperature and humidity level, but others become hot and sweaty at higher temperatures.

Lastly, to protect the most delicate areas of your horse's face, apply waterproof sun block or zinc oxide to any places with white hair or exposed pink skin. Sunscreens designed specifically for horses include Healthy Haircare Sunscreen and Quic Screen Sunscreen.