

Are You an Equestrian Athlete?

Horseback riding can be a leisurely, enjoyable pastime — but if you want to learn how to jump, compete, or ride with any speed, you will need to adopt an athletic lifestyle.

Use this little quiz to see if you are a recreational rider or an athlete. Circle the answers that are most accurate:

#1 - How often do you ride?

Horseback riding can be expensive, so if you are serious about riding and can only afford one lesson a week, you may need to get creative and look for additional opportunities for saddle time.

- A — Almost every day. Give me an extra horse, I'll ride it!
- B — Several days a week.
- C — Once a week.
- D — Maybe a couple of times a month...?

#2 - Do you practice riding without stirrups and in a two-point or standing position?

These exercises, practiced correctly, can really help you develop your balance and strength in the saddle — no matter what kind of saddle you use!

- A — Every single ride.
- B — I practice inconsistently, but I do it.
- C — I'm all about it during No-Stirrup November, less so the rest of the year.
- D — I cry if my instructor tells me to drop my stirrups.

#3 - Do you participate in a physical activity outside of horseback riding?

School sports, dance or workout classes can all provide cross-training that complements your workout in the saddle.

- A — I'm playing sports or in the gym almost every day.
- B — No formal sports or classes, but I'm pretty active during my free time.
- C — I try to get moving a couple times a week. Sometimes I even succeed.
- D — My life outside of the barn: desk, car, couch, bed.

#4 - How often do you stretch?

Practicing yoga, barre or similar exercises multiple times a week will improve your ability to follow the horse's movement, and can help prevent injury. Stretching before and after a ride can also minimize post-ride soreness.

- A — I stretch for at least a few minutes every day.
- B — I stretch or do yoga several days a week.
- C — I don't have a consistent routine, but I try to stretch before I ride.
- D — The last time I stretched was when my horse dove for a tasty patch of grass.

#5 - What kind of aerobic activity do you practice?

This sustained activity improves your stamina and strengthens your heart and lungs, so you won't be wheezing after a long posting trot! Your cardio workout might look like brisk walking, jogging, swimming, biking, dancing, or practicing exercises such as jumping jacks or jump rope.

- A — I get a minimum of 20-30 minutes of cardio in several days a week.
- B — I don't do anything special, but I get a lot of steps in every day.
- C — When I'm motivated, I go for a jog or a hike.
- D — I get out of breath going to catch my horse in the pasture.

#6 - Do you do any kind of strength training?

Working on your muscle tone and strength can improve your posture and stability in the saddle. If gyms aren't your thing, you can practice at-home exercises such as squats and planks without any special equipment.

- A — I work out so regularly that I get cranky if I miss a single day.
- B — I only practice for a few minutes at a time, but I get my exercises in several days a week.
- C — I occasionally commit to a workout program and stick with it for a week or two.
- D — I can feel my abs sometimes when I sneeze.

#7 - How often do you pay attention to your breath?

Improving your breathing technique can have a profound impact on both your riding and your overall health. Horseback riders in general are very bad about holding their breath — and trust us, when you do, your horse knows!

- A — I meditate or practice breathwork exercises, and tune into my breath in the saddle.
- B — I pay attention to it when I am stretching or working out, but forget about it the rest of the time.
- C — Only when an instructor reminds me.
- D — Isn't my body supposed to take care of that on its own?

#8 - How well do you hydrate?

You might find water boring, but it's pretty essential — especially when you're riding in hot weather.

- A — I drink water all day long.
- B — I try to balance out my coffee/tea/juice habit with water, especially on riding days.
- C — I'm not always the greatest at hydrating, but I do okay with flavored water or sports drinks.
- D — Water is gross. I'm more a soft drink person, personally.

#9 - What's your diet like?

We're not talking about fad diets here, designed to make you lose weight; these are rarely good for you in the long run, and fit riders can come in all sizes. What IS important is that you're eating food that gives you energy to ride and helps your body recover from exercise.

- A — I eat a pretty balanced diet with lots of healthy fats, lean protein and veggies.
- B — I don't go out of my way to eat well, but I do try to keep sugar and fast food to a minimum.
- C — I go through phases. I clean up my diet, then fall off the wagon.
- D — At my last horse show I had a bag of potato chips for breakfast.

If you answered mostly A's . . . **you are definitely an equestrian athlete!** You are likely to develop strong riding skills and enjoy consistent progress, especially if you are equally devoted to learning about your equine partner.

If you answered mostly B's . . . **your horse appreciates your efforts!** You should be able to safely enjoy most riding disciplines, but may need to Level Up your fitness to be competitive or improve your horse's way of moving.

If you answered mostly C's . . . **you can learn to ride comfortably, but your progress will seem slow.** You may find some horses difficult to ride, or take a tumble if something goes wrong.

If you answered mostly D's . . . **your horse probably doesn't love to carry you!** You can ride recreationally, but you'll need to make some changes to progress beyond basic riding skills — and to reduce your risk of injury when you fall.



HorseSense Learning Levels

Equestrian Athlete Pledge

My favorite exercises for improving equestrian fitness:

CARDIO/AEROBIC FITNESS:

STRENGTH TRAINING:

FLEXIBILITY:

MOBILITY:

My favorite exercises that take 5 minutes or less: _____

For the next 30 days, I pledge to train like an equestrian athlete by: _____

NAME: _____

DATE: ____/____/____