

When trouble strikes!

It's a fact of life that riders fall and horses get injured, but our expert guide to coping in an emergency will ensure you're the calm after a storm

If someone falls off and hurts themselves while they're out hacking, or your horse gets ill or injured, it's all too easy to panic. Your mind can go blank and you find that you've forgotten what to do. But make the right moves in those first vital seconds, minutes and hours after an emergency hits and you can turn a potentially life-threatening situation into one with a happy ending.

Here to help guide you through the basics of rider and equine first aid are medic Kay Patterson and vet Nikki Brown. Kay runs human first aid courses and Nikki is from the Ashbrook Equine Hospital in Cheshire. Together they've created a plan to help you keep it together should the worst happen. Read on for advice that could save lives or, at the very least, help you save on vet's bills as your horse is treated promptly and is able to heal faster.

Learning the basics of rider first aid will mean you'll know what to do if someone has a fall

Turn the page for essential rider and horse first aid





OUR EXPERT

KAY PATTERSON is managing director of Medi-K first aid training. For details, see www.medi-k.co.uk

Rider first aid

If you ride horses, chances are you're going to suffer a fall at some point - or have to deal with someone who has fallen - and so enrolling on a first aid course is hugely useful.

A course will teach you the basics of emergency first aid, and the initial thing we teach on our courses is what to do if you're first on the scene of an accident.

First, make sure the casualty is able to breathe before you dial 999 or 112 (turn to page 125 for more on this emergency number). Call for bystander help if possible and ask them to make the call while you attend to the casualty.

A first aid course will teach you how to safely

open the airways if someone's struggling to breathe - and how to perform a 'primary survey'. This is a systematic way of spotting and treating any life-threatening conditions. In order of priority, you'll be taught how to first make sure you're not in danger - and securing any loose horses must be a priority to avoid further injury.

You'll then be taught how to check whether they're conscious, how to make sure their airway is open, and check to see if their breathing's normal. If they're unconscious and not breathing normally, you may have to perform CPR (see right for a basic guide). Again, a first aid course will show you the correct CPR technique.



EXPERT TIP

To perform CPR, give 30 chest compressions, then two rescue breaths. Continue doing this, only stopping if the casualty recovers, the paramedics arrive or you become unwell yourself.

If someone falls and hurts themselves, it's important to know what to do



A first aid course will stand you in good stead for a real emergency



Sign up for a basic first aid course so you're prepared if the worst happens



The next stage

Making sure the casualty is safe and able to breathe until the emergency services arrive is your priority. As we've mentioned before, it's important not to move anyone who may have a neck injury - your job is simply to help keep them breathing until help arrives.

Once the paramedics get there they'll examine the fallen rider from head to toe to check for injury. This can be done by someone who's had correct first aid training, but as a guide, on a first aid course, you'll learn the basics of what to look for:

- **Head and neck** Check for bruising, bleeding and broken bones

- **Shoulders and chest** Check for signs of a fracture and whether the chest moves easily and equally on both sides
- **Abdomen and pelvis** Gently feel the abdomen to check for signs of pain
- **Legs and arms** Check each leg and arm in turn for evidence of a fracture and any sign of pain
- **Pockets and clues** Loosen tight clothing and look for any medical details, such as a medic alert bracelet
- **Think clearly** Always take a step back when assessing the scene to ensure you don't miss anything that could be detrimental in helping the rider survive



OUR EXPERT

NIKKI BROWN is a vet at Ashbrook Equine Hospital in Cheshire, part of the XLVets group, visit www.ashbrookequinehospital.co.uk. More information on XLVets can be found at www.xlequine.co.uk

Gently lift your horse's tail and insert the thermometer a few inches into his rectum



Equine first aid

As an owner you'll know your horse's behaviour and habits better than anyone. If you spot something out of the ordinary you'll be able to pick up on it straight away. If you think your horse is not his usual self, check to see if his temperature, pulse and respiration rates (TPR) are normal. Keep a record

of his normal TPR rates to hand so you can compare. To take his TPR, follow this guide:

- **Temperature** When checking your horse's temperature ask someone to hold him for you. Stand to the side of his hindquarters, not directly behind. Gently lift his tail and insert the



To take his pulse, run your hands over his jaw bone to locate his artery

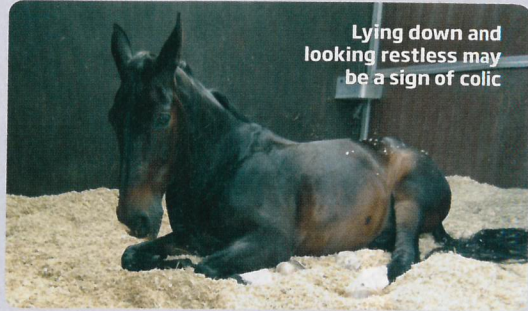
Count how many times your horse's nostrils flare to measure his breaths



thermometer a few inches into his rectum and hold on to the far end for one minute. The normal temperature for a horse is 37.5° to 38.5°, anything different to this could explain why your horse is off colour.

- **Pulse** The easiest pulse to take on your horse is the artery that runs over his jaw bone. Feeling the pulse here can take practise as it has a habit of moving away from your fingers, but with persistence this is an effective method. Your horse's normal heart rate should be around 20 to 40 beats per minute. Painful conditions such as colic and laminitis can elevate this.
- **Respiratory rate** There are two ways you can measure how many breaths your horse is taking. The first is to count how many times the nostrils flare and the second is by watching the ribs move up and down. This technique needs practise as it can be hard to measure. The normal breathing rate is eight to 12 breaths per minute. Horses who have a high breathing rate at rest may be showing signs of chest infections or allergies.

Turn the page for advice on what to do if your horse suffers colic, an eye injury or a fractured bone



Lying down and looking restless may be a sign of colic

If you suspect colic...

Colic is a general term used to describe abdominal pain. It has many causes and its symptoms can vary from mild to extreme. In some cases it can prove fatal. The signs include:

- Observing his flank or biting his abdomen
- Lying down for prolonged periods
- Increased pawing at the ground and box walking
- Constantly getting up and down and appearing distressed

What to do

If you're worried your horse may have colic, first call the vet, then follow these steps:

1. Don't administer any medications as this could be counter-productive.
2. Remove any food from his stable and make sure he doesn't eat his bedding.
3. Gentle walking can be helpful but only if it's safe to do so.
4. It may be safer to walk your horse on a lunge line in a sand school in case he gets down to roll.
5. Keep yourself safe and don't go in a stable with a distressed, thrashing horse.



Quietly walking your horse may help ease the symptoms until your vet arrives

If you suspect a fracture...

A fracture, especially of the leg, used to mean euthanasia. However, with advances in veterinary surgery, many are now treatable. A break may not be immediately obvious and your horse might just look severely lame, so call your vet if you're worried. While a serious fracture will be obvious, with the bone sometimes protruding from the body, other fractures can be less clear to see. Your horse may be very distressed and sweaty due to extreme

pain, and lameness can be extreme to moderate. Swelling is also likely.

What to do

Call your vet straight away and don't move your horse until he arrives unless it's absolutely necessary.

If it's a bad fracture your horse may be in shock, so make sure to cover him with a blanket and calmly watch him until help comes.



Keep your horse still, calm and warm until the vet arrives

If he has an eye injury...

If your horse has an eye injury always call the vet as untreated injuries can become infected and, in extreme cases, lead to the horse losing his sight in that eye. Signs of an eye injury include:

- The eye may be swollen or half shut with excessive tearing and blinking
- It will be painful to the touch
- There may be a visible injury

What to do

Call your vet out immediately as eye injuries are classed as a veterinary emergency, and keep your horse calm and still until he arrives. If anything is sticking out of the eye, leave it in place until the vet gets there.



Excessive tearing could be a sign of injury



Wound management is one of the most common problems vets have to deal with



Keep the wound clean

Treating wounds

Try to stay calm if your horse gets injured, however big or small the cut. Take a deep breath and think clearly about what to do. Your first step should be to secure the horse, keep him calm and still, and gently wash the wound with water, either from a hose on a slow trickle or squirted from a plastic syringe. Once it's clean you can inspect and assess the damage, though don't be tempted to gunk up

the wound with antiseptic cream. Instead, keep it clean and let nature take its course, or lightly bandage it until the vet arrives if it's more serious.

Wounds near a joint or tendon can be very serious - even if they look minor - as damage here can be life-threatening, so ring your vet for advice. Meanwhile, obvious lameness that's been caused by an innocuous



A small wound may belie a more serious injury

MAKE SURE
your horse is up to date with his tetanus vaccination

looking wound can indicate a more serious injury beneath the surface.

A heavily bleeding wound may need stitching, so apply pressure to the cut before your vet arrives, and bear in mind that discreet puncture wounds may look small but can be serious or hide something that's embedded.

For in-depth advice on treating wounds, see our wound care special in issue 398 - for a back issue call 0844 848 8872.

First aid facts

- If you need the emergency services, dial 112 instead of 999. Using this number means they can use GPS to track your mobile to within three phone masts, and so will be able to get to you faster
- Every time the air ambulance goes to the aid of a fallen rider it costs several thousand pounds. Air ambulances in the East Anglian region estimate the cost of each rescue to be £2,800
- Many village halls have a defibrillator that can be used in an emergency. Find where they're dotted around your local hacking routes at www.defibfinder.co.uk You don't need special training to use one and each machine gives clear, spoken instructions
- All horse-related accidents should be reported to the British Horse Society's dedicated website at www.horseaccidents.org.uk



Dial 112 instead of 999 to help the emergency services find you faster



First aid kit essentials

- ✓ Blunt-ended scissors
- ✓ Thermometer
- ✓ Self-sticking crepe bandages
- ✓ Cotton wool
- ✓ Swabs
- ✓ Gloves
- ✓ Torch
- ✓ Wire cutters
- ✓ Paper towel or kitchen roll
- ✓ Gamgee
- ✓ Poultice
- ✓ Salt
- ✓ Small plastic bowl