

HELMET CERTIFICATION, FITTING, AND SAFETY

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Helmet Certification

When purchasing an equestrian helmet, riders should look for American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) and Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) certification. These certifications insure that the helmet complies with the basic helmet safety regulations. Helmets not certified by ASTM and SEI do not comply with industry standard and may offer sub-standard protection.

Equestrian helmets are constructed differently from other safety helmets (bicycle and motorcycle) as they are designed to protect more of the rider's head while not interfering with sight or balance. They are specifically made to reduce penetration by blunt objects (such as a horse's hoof) and to absorb some of the impact from a fall. Bicycle and motorcycle helmets do not provide the flexibility and safety offered by equestrian helmets.

Proper helmet fit is important

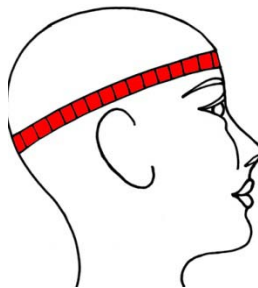
In the past helmets have been uncomfortable, hot, and ill fitting, leading many riders to forego the use of helmets. Recent advances, such as ventilation, lighter weight, and adjustable chin straps, however, have made helmets safer and more comfortable. More western looking helmets are being developed for those riders that want safety with a western look.

Each rider should have a helmet that is properly fitted to his/her head for maximum safety. Therefore, equestrian helmets should not be shared among riders.

Helmet Fitting

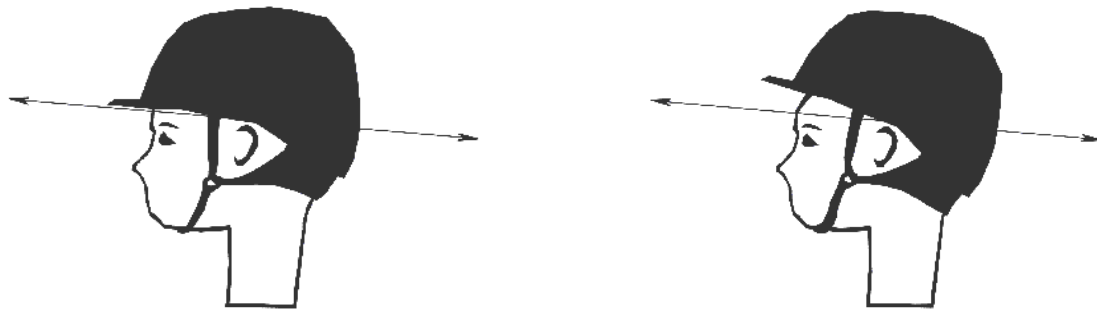
Equestrian helmets come in many sizes and styles. Finding a proper fitting helmet for your riding discipline can save money, time and effort. Helmet sizes are based on the circumference at the widest part of the rider's head approximately one inch above the eyebrows (Figure 1). This measurement is then matched to the proper helmet size (each style of helmet should have an appropriate sizing chart).

Figure 1



Helmets may vary with style and brand so trying on helmets before purchase is highly recommended. The helmet should fit around the rider's entire head with the visor level just above the eyebrows (should not be above 1.5 inches (Figure 2)). The chin strap should be attached so the strap is touching the skin under the rider's chin, not hanging loose. The suspension and chin straps should not pinch the rider's ears.

Figure 2



Properly Fitting Helmet

Improperly Fitting Helmet

The rider should be able to move his/her head vigorously with minimal helmet movement. If the helmet slides, a smaller size may be needed while a larger size is warranted if the helmet is too tight, causing discomfort. Long hair should not be placed under the helmet in a bun, in a high pony tail or flipped underneath but rather should be pulled back into a low enough pony tail so that it does not interfere with fitting. Most helmet retailers can assist in the helmet fitting process if the rider remains unsure as to proper fit.

Safety

In order to maximize the benefits of helmet usage, there are some recommendations that are suggested that helmet owners follow.

Helmets should be replaced at least every 5 years, due to the possibility for unseen material deterioration. Helmet standards continually changing and new technologies frequently appear on the market. Purchasing a new helmet every 5 years allows you to stay up to date on the latest helmet safety and fashion.

Helmets should be replaced after any major impact to ensure the rider's protection. When you take a fall, a certified helmet absorbs energy by crushing. This extends your head's stopping time to reduce the peak impact on the brain. While difficult to see on the outside, the "crushing effect" will diminish with additional falls, decreasing the helmets ability to protect. Replacing helmets when appropriate insure the highest level of safety and comfort to the rider.

Figure 3



A damaged helmet that needs to be replaced.