



Horseback Riding for Leg Amputees



Horseback riding is an exciting and therapeutic activity that many Champs enjoy. Amputees may need some adjustments or adaptations to ride comfortably and safely. Researching riding schools in your area to find trained instructors who have taught children with unique needs is a good idea.

The saddle, bridle and reins will likely not require any adaptations for leg amputees. If stability and balance are a concern, especially when first starting out, rolled leather hand holds can be attached to the front of the saddle.

Riding with an artificial limb helps with balance and security. Some minor modifications may be necessary.

Below knee amputees

Should rough edges of an artificial limb rub against the horse's side or the rider experience abrasions, the fit of the artificial limb can be adjusted:

- lowering of the artificial limb behind the knee (popliteal brim);
- flattening the middle part of the calf on the artificial limb;
- aligning the artificial limb so that the heel is tilted inward with the toe angled upward and outward.
- dependable suspension – either a locking system or the addition of a suspension sleeve (many prosthetic companies have variations of below knee suspension sleeves).

Above knee amputees

Above-knee amputees may experience some discomfort at the top of their residual limb which may pinch between the artificial limb and the saddle. A very short residual limb or pressure points in the socket may be reasons to ride without an artificial limb. Extra suspension (such as the Ottobock (AK) Suspension Belt or the Power Short or Power Belt Auxiliary Suspension Belts by Knit-Rite) will help amputees wearing a suction socket – as jarring that occurs while riding can gradually work the socket loose.

Power Short Auxiliary Suspension Belt



Ottobock (AK) Suspension Belt



A locking device, such as a Mauch S-N-S knee, may also be used to keep the knee flexed at the desired angle. Bilateral amputees with short residual limbs or hip disarticulation amputees usually use bucket-type devices – seats with leather sockets.

Stirrups that can trap an artificial foot can be dangerous. Safety stirrups, which usually come with a safety latch, release the stirrup in the event of a fall. Devonshire boots (stirrups that look like a boot toe) are a good choice. However, the rider's foot needs to be secure enough within the stirrup so that the artificial foot is not slipping through or falling out – rubber inserts can be added or the rider can wear a boot with a heel that will help hold the foot in place.

Things to check:

- Fenced or indoor rings are ideal.
- Horses or ponies with a quiet and even temperament.
- Instructors should always be in attendance for beginners to help with leading and side walking.
- Instructors with experience in teaching amputees.
- Helmets with chin straps are essential.
- Special equipment such as hand holds, Devonshire boots, halter leads, and a safety belt for the rider's waist that a side walker can hold.

Resources:

- CanTRA – Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association, have many accredited members across Canada – www.cantra.ca – E mail: ctra@golden.net, Tel: 519 767-0700.