

How to Bring Your Horse/Pony Back to Full Fitness

Fitness takes time, there are no shortcuts. Sudden increase in riding can result in a pulled or torn muscle.

PREPARATIONS

First preparations must be made for returning your horse to riding after they have had time off.

- Check tack. Clean, oil and check stitching. Check the fit as your horse may have changed shape and uncomfortable saddles can cause your horse to misbehave. Make sure your numnah and girth are clean.
- Have your horse shod or trimmed.
- Have your horse's teeth checked and rasped if necessary.
- Check 'flu' and tetanus are up to date.
- Worm your horse if due.
- Give your horse a good groom and tidy mane and tail.

STAGES

Your plan can be divided into three stages.

1. Walk work
2. Trotting and schooling.
3. Fast work and competitions.

Stage 1 – If your horse has had a long holiday you will need to start with three weeks of walking only. You should to start with 20 minutes and gradually build up over the three weeks to 1 or 1 ½ hours.

Look out for stiffness and if your horse is tired stop as you could risk injury.

Keep an eye out for any sores in the saddle and girth area. Make sure you sponge away all sweat marks. If sores are seen wash with salt water.

Keep checking the fit of your tack and if you think your horse has a sore back call your vet or physio out to check your horses back.

Horses returning from injury, older or very young may need a longer period of walking, up to an additional three weeks before moving onto stage 2. If in doubt consult your instructor or vet.

Stage 2 - If your horse has been kept in moderate work your fitness plan could commence at this stage. For the next three weeks you can begin to introduce slow trotting and hillwork as a muscle builder. You can extend the work to up to two hours.

Some schooling work on the flat can be introduced, begin with thirty minutes and concentrate on transitions and suppling exercises. Gradually increase your schooling time but vary the work by continuing to hack.

If after week five your horse can trot up a hill and not be out of breath some slow cantering can be started, if not repeat week five.

Stage 3 - Now you are ready to build more muscle and stamina in your horse. Cantering on an incline should now be included, building to a stronger pace and longer distance. Begin with a quarter of a mile of canter and trot combined and gradually build up.

When you have built up to a mile in a strong canter you will then be ready at around week nine for a controlled gallop. This faster work should only be twice a week and in between schooling, jumping and hacking.

Example Plan

		MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN	
Stage 1	Week 1	20mins Hack - walk only	20mins Hack - walk only	25mins Hack - walk only	DAY OFF	25mins Hack - walk only	30mins Hack - walk only	30mins Hack - walk only	
	Week 2	35mins Hack - walk only	35mins Hack - walk only	40mins Hack - walk only	DAY OFF	40mins Hack - walk only	50mins Hack - walk only	50mins Hack - walk only	
	Week 3	1hr Hack - walk only	1hr Hack - walk only	1hr 10mins Hack - walk only	DAY OFF	1hr 10mins Hack - walk only	1hr 20mins Hack - walk only	1hr 20mins Hack - walk only	
Stage 2	Week 4	1-1½ hr Hack - Walk with some slow trotting	30mins Schooling - walk & trot *Suppling	1-1½ hr Hack - Walk with some slow trotting	DAY OFF	1-1½ hr Hack - Walk with some slow trotting	30mins Schooling - walk & trot *Transitions	1-1½ hr Hack - Walk with some slow trotting	
	Week 5	Short Hack Hill-work & slow trotting	40mins Schooling - walk & trot *Pole work	Long Hack - with some slow trotting	DAY OFF	Short Hack Hill-work & slow trotting	30mins Lesson - flatwork walk & trot	Hack Hill-work & slow trotting	
	Can your horse trot up a hill and not be out of breath, if not repeat week 5.								
	Week 6	50mins Schooling - walk, trot & steady canter	Long Hack - some steady canter	50mins Schooling - walk, trot & canter *Pole work	DAY OFF	Short Hack Hill-work & slow canter	1hr Lesson - Pole work walk, trot & canter	Hack Hill-work	
Stage 3	Week 7	Hack - with slow canter ¼ mile	Schooling	Hack Hill-work	DAY OFF	Hack - with slow canter ¼ mile	1hr Lesson - Jumping	Long Hack	
	Week 8	Hack - with canter ½ mile	Schooling - flatwork	Schooling - Jumping	DAY OFF	Hack - with strong canter ½ mile	1hr Lesson - Dressage	Hack	
	Week 9	Hack - with canter ¾ mile	Schooling - Jumping	Hack - with strong canter ¾ mile	DAY OFF	Lesson - Cross- country	Schooling - flatwork	Show Jumping competition	
Now you are ready for controlled gallop.									

To Maintain your horses fitness they should be ridden 4-5 times a week, with the same variety of work.

This Plan is an Example only, your fitness plan needs to be tailored to suit your own timetable, facilities available and your horse’s needs. If in any doubt please ask your instructor.

Please refer to the Pony Club Manual of Horsemanship when creating your own. There are apps available to help chart your progress, for example: Equilab & Mytracks.

Now it is over to you to make your own Plan for your horse and start the fitness process. Please keep a record of how you get on (This can include pictures, videos, notes, observations etc) this can help you review how you would perhaps adapt your plan in the future.