



Learning to Half-Halt Your Brain: Understanding Equestrian Anxiety and Implementing Effective Calming Strategies

By Lisa Weiss, LCSW

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a *feeling* people experience when faced with overwhelming situations or uncertainty. It is also a physiological experience of bodily sensations. Anxiety is a helpful emotion when it comes to keeping us safe, but it can be maladaptive.

What is Equestrian Anxiety?

Horses are experts on picking up on their rider's anxiousness. It's not uncommon for equestrians to experience anxiety. Healthy amounts of anxiety can keep riders focused and motivated at shows. However, anxiety becomes maladaptive to riders when it's interfering with their ability to stay present, ride safely and confidently.

Common places anxiety develops for equestrians:

- Transitioning to a new barn or new trainer
- Riding after an injury/scary experience
- After a horse has been injured or out of work
- At shows

Strategies for reducing anxiety:

5 Senses

- 5 things you can **see**
- 4 things you can **touch**
- 3 things you can **hear**
- 2 things you can **smell**
- 1 thing you can **taste**



Balloon Breathing

- Place one hand on your chest.
- Place one hand on your stomach.
- Inhale through your nose for a count of 4. Pretend you are blowing up a balloon in your belly. Your stomach should expand, not your chest.
- Exhale through your mouth for a count of 4. Pretend you are "deflating" the balloon in your belly.



When to reach out for help:

If anxiety is interfering with your quality of life, including your time spent at the barn and with your horses, reaching out to a licensed mental health professional may help. A therapist can help you learn and implement healthy coping skills so you can enjoy riding again.

Learn more about Therapy for Equestrian Anxiety:



www.bravemindsnj.com



(908) 242-3634



connect@bravemindsnj.com



3322 US-22 Suite 1401
Branchburg, NJ 08876