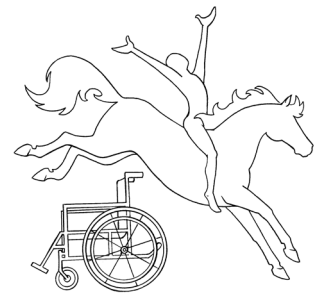


# Therapy Services at Ride On



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Serving the San Fernando and Conejo Valleys

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## Frequently Asked Questions:

### What is Hippotherapy?

Hippotherapy (Hippos from the Greek word for horse) is a term which refers to the use of the movement of a horse as a treatment strategy used by trained physical, occupational or speech therapists. The movement and sensory input from the horse can be used to address posture, balance, sensory integration, coordination, communication and mobility in children and adults with disabilities, the horse is used as a part of an integrated treatment program to achieve functional outcomes.

Hippotherapy is considered standard practice by the American Physical Therapy Association, the American Occupational Association and the American Speech and Hearing Association. There is ample research to show that Hippotherapy can be of great benefit to children and adults with a wide variety of impairments.

### What are the qualifications of Therapists using Hippotherapy?

Physical, occupational and speech pathologists using Hippotherapy are licensed by the State and have completed additional training in the use of Hippotherapy in treatment. The American Hippotherapy Association, Inc (AHA) offers courses directly related to the treatment principles of Hippotherapy. The American Hippotherapy Certification Board (AHCB) offers two levels of certification exams; an entry level exam leading to certification in Hippotherapy and an advanced exam, leading to a Board Certified Hippotherapy Clinical Specialist (HPCS).

### Who is on the team providing Hippotherapy?

Hippotherapy is provided by a well trained staff which includes: the therapist, the horse, the horse handler and safety assistants, as needed. The therapist must be well qualified to provide this complex treatment strategy (see above). The horse must be exceedingly well trained and willing to do the job. The horse handler must be expert in being able to control the horse, have him perform the maneuvers called on by the therapist and be able to control any potential safety issues that may arise. Even the well trained therapy horse may want to respond to an unexpected startle, but the expert horse handler will be able to anticipate and control the situation without any compromise to the treatment.

### Why the horse?

The well-trained therapy horse moves in a rhythmic, symmetrical and organized way. Each step the horse takes provides strong physical input in many dimensions including up and down and side to side. There is sensory input from the horse to the vestibular system which regulates balance, to the proprioceptive system which registers position in space, and to the visual system. The horse, in some respects, 'lends' his nervous system to the patient so that the patient may experience organized movement. This organized movement with natural variability can not be achieved by a machine or in a clinic setting. Horses are selected for their movement quality and even temperament and then undergo additional training. The horse accurately and tirelessly provides ample opportunities for the patient to experience movement and sensory input that will enhance their quality of life.

### What is the difference between Therapeutic Riding and Hippotherapy?

In Hippotherapy, the licensed therapist works on specific functional goals, with the outcome of improved function in the patient's desired setting – whether home, school, work or in leisure. The therapist's focus is on getting the patient to experience organized sensory-motor input and then take that experience to develop their own abilities. The certified therapeutic riding instructor is focused on adapting the skill of riding for individuals with special needs and maximizing the rider's function on the horse. The instructor's skills and the adapted environment of the therapeutic riding facility makes riding accessible and achievable for children and adults with physical, cognitive or behavioral challenges.

Who benefits from Hippotherapy?

Children and adults with mild to severe physical, sensory, cognitive or speech/language challenges may benefit from Hippotherapy. Common impairments that can be addressed with Hippotherapy include: abnormal tone, balance, coordination, motor planning, communication, postural asymmetry, postural control, decreased mobility, sensory processing difficulties, and/or poor oral motor control.

Is Hippotherapy appropriate for everybody?

The horse, or the outdoor environment where horses are found, is not for everyone. Contraindications exist for anyone where the movement of the horse or the environment will make a patient worse. Examples may include: advanced osteoporosis, osteogenesis imperfecta, severe scoliosis, acute painful conditions, unstable bones or joints, severe fears, and advanced atlanto-axial Instability as sometimes found in Down Syndrome or juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

Precautions exist for those patients where equine movement or the environment may be difficult to control, or for whom the therapist may not be skilled enough to treat. Examples may include: Significant allergies/sun sensitivities, hip subluxation, obesity, significantly poor head control, or significant hypotonia.

Safety is paramount in the environment of the horse.

An initial evaluation is conducted by a trained therapist to assess if Hippotherapy is an appropriate treatment strategy.

What should I look for in a clinic that provides Hippotherapy?

Safety. Assess whether the facility is well maintained, that horses are well trained, well cared for and under control and that the staff is adequately trained in providing services. Safety equipment (helmets, belts, harnesses) are only as safe as the staff using them.

Resources:

American Hippotherapy Association: <http://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org/>

American Occupational Therapy Association: <http://www.aota.org/>

American Physical Therapy Association: <http://www.apta.org/>

American Speech and Hearing Association: <http://www.asha.org/>

Horses and Humans Foundation <http://www.horsesandhumans.org>

Federation of Horses in Education and Therapy International <http://www.frdi.net>