



Tips for riding headshakers

“Symptoms”

include:

head
twitching,
tossing,
snaking etc
snorting
nose rubbing
pawing
striking front
leg
teeth grind
etc

Don't ride until symptoms have diminished to mild

Any symptoms make the breathing increase which in turn worsens the symptoms. So it's best to wait until your Equine Breathing program has had a significant effect in reducing symptoms before starting to ride again. It's impossible to predict how long this will take as it depends on the severity of the symptoms, the strength of your Equine Breathing program and on the individual but it will probably be in the order of weeks rather than months.

If you continue to ride while the horse is still headshaking then the symptoms will work to reduce the effectiveness of the Equine Breathing training and so recovery may be delayed.

Exceptions to this advice;

If your horse headshakes as much when not being ridden as when ridden then it's probably ok to ride but follow as many of the tips below as possible.

Or if your horse is stabled for long periods and riding is the only way to provide exercise then riding may be better than the lack of exercise but follow as many of the other tips as possible

Groundwork

If symptoms are milder in groundwork it can be a good alternative to riding, while you wait for the symptoms to diminish enough to ride, but if your horse headshakes significantly when in groundwork then the above advice applies – best to wait.

Do Equine Breathing before riding

Ideally do a Breather session before riding but if you don't have a Breather do a minimum of 30 minutes 1N. This can count as your regular 30 minutes a day. If you can't do the full 30 minutes of 1N then do as much as you can – even a couple of minutes is better than nothing. But try and complete the full 30 minutes of 1N each day to give it a chance to work eg 15m before, 15 after riding.

Exercising the horse in hand in their Breather boosts the Equine Breathing effect so it can be helpful to do 15 minutes or so before riding. The pace of this booster session depends on which Breather you are using.

Relieve any symptoms during riding

If the horse starts to headshake, nose rub or snort etc then get off immediately and do 1N until the symptoms disappear. Re-mount, but get off again immediately if the symptoms reoccur and repeat the 1N. You may be more off than on at first but gradually the horse will last for longer without symptoms. If you can't relieve the symptoms, then again, it's best to stop riding until the symptoms have significantly reduced.

Use a Nose Net Plus

If you want to ride your horse before the symptoms have **completely** disappeared, it's a good idea to use a Nose Net Plus. Nose nets can't retrain the breathing the way that Breathers and 1N do but they can have a small effect which may be just enough to keep the breathing below the trigger point for symptoms. This is worth having in the early stages of recovery.

[How to do
Equine Breathing](#)

[Headshaking
recovery with
Equine Breathing](#)

[Types of
Breathers](#)

[Nose Net Plus](#)

If your horse was unable to tolerate a nose net before you started Equine Breathing, you may have to wait a week or so into your Equine Breathing program for them to be able to accept and benefit from a nose net.

You probably already do many of the following in your horse's management.

Reduce stress as much as possible

Stress results in increased adrenaline production which further increases anxiety and the breathing. This compromises the physiology and therefore encourages symptoms and the symptoms themselves also increase stress.

Being hypersensitive, many headshakers suffer badly from flies so be sure to do everything possible to protect them at all times. Fly masks and rugs are almost essential for riding. Be a bit careful of chemical fly repellents in case they make the symptoms worse, and if necessary, use the more natural, essential oils repellents ([Eureka from bitefree](#) is an effective one).

If the horse is photosensitive, a UV mask is helpful until this symptom fades.

You will know various factors that are stressful to your horse and increase symptoms; it may be rapeseed pollen, rain, wind or arena dust etc. Avoid these (and any others that you can identify) environmental factors as much as possible until the horse is symptom free. It may be that you find riding in the very early morning or late evening is less difficult for your horse for example.

Promote relaxation

The opposite of stress, relaxation enables adrenaline levels and anxiety to drop so the breathing reduces and therefore the physiology is less compromised allowing symptoms to reduce. Here are some ideas.

Ride on a loose rein.

If your horse is more relaxed in company ride with a friend. If they are more relaxed alone, ride alone

Use training methods such as Straightness Training that encourage relaxation. And Straightness Training groundwork can be done wearing a Breather or else with frequent 1N breaks to further promote relaxation.

If your horse is anxious, relieve them of the burden of leadership by taking responsibility yourself through for example, simple control of movement exercises. This enables them to go "off duty", let go and relax.

Increase or introduce bodywork in / to your management regime. The Masterson Method has some wonderful tension relievers that can be easily learnt on line. Relief of tension in the TMJ and jaw is very easy and quick to do and is a great way to prepare and relax the horse for riding.

Promote comfort

Identify any potential room for improvement eg get your saddle checked.

Try riding bitless

Avoid any aspects of riding that your horse currently finds difficult eg schooling, traffic etc. Ride in the way your horse enjoys most.

Allow the horse to set the pace, don't push or restrain. In some horses symptoms are worse in faster paces in others they're worse in walk.



[Straightness Training](#)

[see end of this article for control of movement exercises](#)

[Jim Masterson releasing tension in the TMJ and jaw](#)



[If you have any questions please ask](#)