

Research highlights breast pain in horse riders

August 3 2016, by Andrew White

Thousands of women could be experiencing breast pain while horse riding, according to a new study.

In research carried out by the University of Portsmouth and Sparsholt College Hampshire, 40 per cent of female horse riders who took part in an online survey said they experienced [breast pain](#) while riding.

The in-depth survey, completed by 1,324 female horse riders, showed that breast pain and other [bra](#)-related issues increased with cup size and body mass.

The research was carried out by Dr Jenny Burbage, of the Department of Sport and Exercise Science at University of Portsmouth, and Lorna Cameron, of Sparsholt College Hampshire.

Lead author Dr Burbage, a member of Portsmouth's Research Group in Breast Health, said: "For female horse riders, breast pain, bra issues and having large breasts may be important concerns which have yet to be considered.

"Previous studies have investigated breast pain and bra issues in the general population and a marathon running population, but this is the first time research has investigated a horse riding population.

"Breast pain, breast size and bra issues can impact upon the performance, health and wellbeing of women and should be investigated,

as they can be a barrier to participation in physical activity."

The report found that breast pain was experienced most frequently during the sitting trot, and that 21 per cent of participants with symptoms reported that breast pain affected their horse riding performance.

The trot and canter involve large vertical movements of the horse's body, requiring considerable effort by the rider to maintain postural stability. This effort may be higher for women with larger breasts due to the greater breast momentum created, which may affect their performance and overall experience in horse riding.

The authors concluded that educational initiatives are needed to ensure female horse riders are informed about appropriate bra fit and breast support during horse riding to increase comfort and help reduce the potential negative associations with performance.

Previous research has suggested that 70 to 100 per cent of women are wearing the wrong-sized bra.

Dr Burbage said: "A correctly fitting bra for exercise is essential, as an incorrect fit can contribute to upper body musculoskeletal problems, poor posture and deep bra furrows in the shoulder caused by excessive strap pressure.

"It is particularly important for women with large breasts to wear a well-fitted and supportive bra, as insufficient support for large breasts can also lead to upper body pain and poor posture, yet they are more likely to have an incorrect fit."

A correctly fitting supportive bra would be of benefit not just to the rider, the authors believe.

A previous study has shown that horse heart rate increases as a direct response to tension in the handler or rider.

Dr Burbage said: "The physical application of cues to the horse relies on good postural control by the rider, which can be negatively impacted by pain or discomfort leading to postural asymmetry.

"The ridden horse is trained to respond to subtle cues given by the rider's body, but as a species can detect and respond to physiological changes that the rider may be unaware of."

According to a Sport England report from 2011, 90 per cent of horse riders are female, with about 304,000 women in England taking part in equestrian activities at least once a week.

Of the 532 participants who reported experiencing breast pain, 60 per cent reported that this was always or sometimes linked to their menstrual cycle and 29 per cent felt their breast pain was either sometimes, very often or always a result of horse riding.

Over half of symptomatic participants described the severity of their breast pain as discomforting (56 per cent), with eight per cent describing it as distressing, horrible or excruciating.

Although sports bras were the most frequent type of bra worn for horse riding, only 14 per cent of small-breasted riders and 19 per cent of large-breasted riders opted to exclusively wear a sports bra when they rode a horse.

This compares to 82 per cent and 91 per cent of marathon runners who reported always wearing a sports bra when they took part in moderate or vigorous physical activity respectively.

Dr Burbage said: "Perhaps this is due to the vast majority of sports bras available for purchase being marketed towards runners, leading to the perception that [sports bra](#) use during other sports such as horse riding is not important.

"More work needs to be done in the bra industry to improve shoulder strap design, as well as more awareness of how shoulder straps should fit in order to improve the wearer experience.

"It is especially important that larger-breasted riders, who experienced breast pain and bra issues more frequently, are educated in the importance of appropriate breast support during horse riding.

"Resources should be specifically developed to help educate female horse riders and raise awareness of appropriate breast support for this activity."

Co-author Lorna Cameron added: "Bra issues such as poor fit or insufficient support for larger-breasted riders may negatively affect rider posture, which has implications for dressage performance, as the horse is trained to respond to subtle cues and maintaining a relaxed and upright riding posture can be crucial."

More information: Jenny Burbage et al. An investigation into the prevalence and impact of breast pain, bra issues and breast size on female horse riders, *Journal of Sports Sciences* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/02640414.2016.1210818](https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2016.1210818)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

Citation: Research highlights breast pain in horse riders (2016, August 3) retrieved 23 April 2024

from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-08-highlights-breast-pain-horse-riders.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.