

# The essentials of a basic first aid kit for trail riding

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Whether you are trail riding for the day or taking a week-long pack trip it is wise to have a few basic items in your first aid kit. These items may vary based on your geographic location. In Arizona, for example, the potential for problems like overheating and walking into cactus are clear concerns. This article is written to help you to expect the unexpected and to be prepared for minor catastrophes.

Before beginning an expedition, consider your horse: its physical shape, previous training program, and propensity to injure him or herself. When you have chosen an appropriate trail for distance and difficulty, plan to have enough fresh water and feed for the journey. Oral electrolytes may be helpful to replace those electrolytes lost in sweat, but be sure plain water is also provided. Consider the condition of your horse's shoes, or hooves, and whether your horse should wear boots or leg wraps. Make sure your horse has had a vaccination for tetanus toxoid within the last 3-6 months.

Components of a well packed first aid kit include:

## Medications:

Bute and Banamine paste  
Furacin ointment +/- DMSO gel  
Triple antibiotic ointment  
Electrolyte supplements

## Bandage materials:

Sterile non-stick pads  
Brown or white gauze  
Cotton wraps or quilts and a clean towel  
Vetwrap or an elastic standing bandage  
Elastikon

## Miscellaneous:

Shoe pullers  
Tweezers/pliers  
Sharp scissors  
Thermometer  
Stethoscope  
A bright flashlight

The above components will assist you in being prepared for lacerations, sprained tendons, cactus spines and minor episodes of colic. In general, it is important to make yourself aware of what the normal physical parameters of your horse should be. The normal rectal temperature should be within a range of 99.5-102.5 F, at rest the heart rate should be within 20-44 beats per minute, and the respiratory rate should be within 12-36 respirations per minute.

It is also helpful to know anatomical areas to be concerned about when your horse is injured. For example: a joint is an area in which two or more bones intersect, and can be identified in the legs of the horse where they are able to bend. There are also tendons that run down the back and the front of the legs just below the skin surface that include a

sheath or synovial lining in some areas. Wounds should be cleaned with these structures in mind, and bandaged to prevent further contamination before being examined by your veterinarian. The knowledge that damage to these structures can have serious consequences will help you decide whether or not your catastrophe has become an emergency.

Ask your veterinarian to go over these locations with you, to teach you to take a heart rate on your horse, and to teach you to put on a good bandage. We are your first line of defense and are happy to keep you well informed in case of emergency.