



No Excuses

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[Back to Articles...](#)

Have you used illness or injury as a reason for poor performance in the ring? It is time to say goodbye to excuses. If you are sick or injured and need to make a decision on whether you are well enough to ride, ask yourself: Am I capable of being an effective partner for my horse today?

Once you make the decision to compete, it is time to leave all excuses behind. I am not saying that you should ignore your illness or injury. On the contrary, there are some actions you should consider during your preparation:

- You may need to limit the number of classes that you compete in since you may not have as much stamina or strength as usual.
- Consider hiring a groom or asking a teammate or family member to help you out with horse care, tacking up, stall cleaning or other tasks.
- For an injury, schedule time for stretching, rest, ice, and elevation of the injured area before and after competition.
- If you have an illness, you may need more rest and hydration. Stay out of the hot sun, keep warm and dry if the weather is cold or wet, and bring a change of clothes.
- Time pain or cold medications (if permitted) so they will not wear off while you are competing.
- See a professional for advice. Doctors, physical therapists, chiropractors, nutritionists and other health care professions can speed up your recovery and make you feel more comfortable.
- Learn about your illness or injury so that you know what treatment is best to look after your body.

Developing a positive and focused mindset is key to performing when you are not feeling your best physically. Here are five mental preparation tips you can start today:

1. Avoid dwelling on your illness or injury, and put a positive spin on your situation when speaking with others. The more you talk about your suffering, the more your performance will suffer.
2. Take some time to review what your horse needs from you during your ride. Coming prepared and focused will allow you to have an efficient warm up and save more energy for the ring.
3. Visualize yourself healing and feeling better. Visualization has been shown to cut healing times by one-third.
4. Remember your time in the ring is short. You just have to be on your game for two minutes and then you can rest.
5. Replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations. You must believe that you are capable of having a solid performance in order to execute in the ring.

Listen to your body when making the decision on whether to compete and be honest with yourself about your ability to perform. There are times when rest and recovery is the best option to prevent a chronic injury or serious illness. You put your relationship with your horse at risk if your performance is subpar. The moment you decide to ride, eliminate excuses in order to perform at your best.