



This is me riding Cinnamon. I will never ride a horse, OR a pony, without a helmet.

## Why wear a helmet?

It seems as though more and more people are agreeing with the idea of wearing a helmet while horseback riding. It's logical: you're on a large animal with hard hooves that you could easily tangle with if you hit the ground. Now how about a little Shetland Pony, that's not taller than 3 ½ feet and doesn't really weigh that much? It seems pretty easy to hop on bareback and think, "oh hey, I'm not that far from the ground, I don't need my helmet." Well I'm personally VERY glad I did not think this while one of my friends and I were jumping one weekend.

One afternoon I was at my friend's house riding bareback on her pony, Cinnamon, while my friend rode her horse. We were just playing around in the arena, riding over some little jumps. However, before we got on, I told my friend I was going to go grab my helmet. As I was walking, I kind of had this idea of "oh c'mon, it's only a few feet off the ground, I'll be fine." But I shrugged off those thoughts as I buckled the strap under my chin. After hopping onto Cinnamon, I cantered into the arena and started picking off the jumps one by one. I've learned that when approaching a jump, I should be prepared for the horse to shy or refuse, so I made sure to keep this in mind. As Cinnamon and I approached one of the bigger jumps, I braced and readied for the jump just as I always had, but this time the little pony, just before the jump, ducked left and plodded around the jump. I was only a little thrown off balance by this, so I grabbed a handful of mane to reposition myself on her back, but then she decided to duck even farther away from me, turning even farther to the left. This time, I was not prepared at all, so my legs flew off the pony's back, but my hand stayed gripped onto her mane for a split second longer, spinning me around so I landed flat on my back on the ground. Not only did it knock the wind out of me, but my head whipped back and *slammed* against the ground so hard, that it broke the inside of my helmet. I quick stood up, and it took me a minute to realize what had just happened: I fell off a pony, bashed my head against the ground, and got up just fine with just the slightest bit of a headache. I saved myself the pain of a head injury and a ruined weekend, all thanks to my wonderful helmet.