

Pilot study measuring the effects of therapeutic horseback riding on school-age children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders

Robin L. Gabriels^{a, b, .}, John A. Agnew^{a, b.}, Katherine D. Holt^{b.}, Amy Shoffner^{c.}, Pan Zhaoxing^{a, b.}, Selga Ruzzano^{b.}, Gerald H. Clayton^{a, b.}, Gary Mesibov^{d.}

^a University of Colorado Denver, 13001 E. 17th Place, Aurora, CO 80045, United States

^b Children's Hospital Colorado, 13123 E. 16th Ave, B130, Aurora, CO 80045, United States

^c Colorado Therapeutic Riding Center, 11968 Mineral Road, Longmont, CO 80504, ^d

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 510 Meadowmont Circle, Suite 300, Chapel

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Abstract

This preliminary study examined the effects of 10 weekly lessons of therapeutic horseback riding (THR) on 42 participants diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ages 6–16 years) compared to a subset (n = 16) of the total study population who were first evaluated before and after a 10-week waitlist control condition. All participants received baseline and post-condition assessments in the areas of self-regulation (Irritability, Lethargy, Stereotypic Behavior, and Hyperactivity), adaptive living skills, and motor skills. Participants who completed 10 weeks of THR demonstrated significant improvements on measures of Irritability, Lethargy, Stereotypic Behavior, Hyperactivity, expressive language skills, motor skills, and verbal praxis/motor planning skills. When compared to the pre- and post-assessments of participants from the waitlist control condition, the THR group still showed significant improvements in self-regulation behaviors. The THR-specific change from the baseline to post-assessments suggests that the improvements are related to the THR treatment.

Highlights

► Therapeutic horseback riding (THR) was used with 42 children with ASD. ► Ten weeks of THR improved self-regulation behaviors, motor planning, and language. ► Compared with a waitlist control group, THR improved self-regulation behaviors. ► Future directions include randomized controlled trial, with larger sample size and expansion of outcome measures.

Figures and tables from this article:

