



## Abuse of spurs when riding a horse

### Signs of Abuse

The skin on a horse's sides is just about as sensitive as human skin, no matter how stoically the particular horse may take blows or jabs. Spurs are only meant to supplement leg aids, or cues, but not to be a complete substitution. Even small unroweled spurs can inflict major pain and injury if used by a lazy and vitriolic rider.

Signs of spur abuse in horses and ponies will be injuries right behind the girth area or even under a horse's belly, depending on how long a rider's legs are. These injuries can be as dramatic as bleeding gashes or as subtle as bumps which resemble hives. Hair loss and changes of skin color without bleeding can also be signs.

### Why Horses Don't Protest More

In human minds, if the horse is not bucking, screaming or otherwise making signs of protest, then it must not be in pain. Therefore, use the spurs all you want. The horse does not seem to mind. Riders in the Olympics or at the Spanish Riding School of Vienna use spurs and they are considered the best riders in the world. Beginning riders may confuse the use of gadgets as a substitution for years of training and building up strong legs.

Horses are prey animals. Out in the wild, if a horse showed any sign of pain, then a predator would select them for dinner. A hurt horse was easier to kill than a healthy one. Horses are renowned for ignoring blows, jabs in the mouth and constant drumming on their sides. Although they are stoic, they can feel pain.

### Short Cuts

Spur abuse is not a modern problem for horses. Horses were mainly trained by brute force and fear throughout most of their domestication. A few short, sharp jabs of the spur would stick in any horse's mind that if they wanted to avoid pain, they had better move.

So what are top level riders doing wearing spurs? They often just tickle or touch a horse's sides, not jab or kick. But they also are giving horses signals through shifting body weight, the reins and (if allowed) voice cues. Spurs are not a short cut to schooling the horse to be obedient to your natural aids.