Unsafe Tack and Equipment

Buying used tack is an economical way to get the equipment you need to ride or drive your horse. While it's nice to have tack that looks great, it's more important that it be sturdy and safe. You do not want a [girth](http://horses.about.com/od/choosingandusingtack/tp/Choosing-An-English-Girth-For-Your-Horse.htm) strap to break on your saddle, or a rein to snap while you're asking it to whoa. You don't even have to be going very fast for a broken buckle or strap to cause a dangerous accident. It's important to check any used tack or tack that you own for signs of wear that could lead to it breaking.

**Sheets, Rugs and Blankets**

It's also important that horse blankets such as [fly sheets](http://horses.about.com/od/choosingandusingtack/gr/wrangflysheet.htm), turn-out [rugs](http://horses.about.com/od/myfirsthorser/g/The-Definition-Of-Rug.htm) and [coolers](http://horses.about.com/od/myfirsthorsec/g/The-Definition-Of-Cooler.htm) are in good repair. Ripped blankets, rugs and sheets can be a hazard for the horse and the other horses it's turned out with. Loose belly and leg straps can get tangled around a horse's legs, and it is possible to become tangled in large rips in the fabric. When you notice your horse's blanket is damaged, remove it and repair it.

**Saddles**

There are a few points of wear that you need to check for wear and tear on [saddles](http://horses.about.com/od/understandinghorses/g/saddle.htm). On a [western saddle](http://horses.about.com/od/typesofsaddles/g/western.htm), check the [cinch](http://horses.about.com/od/understandinghorses/g/cinch.htm) strap. The leather should be supple, not dry and cracked. It should be of even thickness and width. Any thin, narrow spots are signs the leather has been strained in that section and may be weakening. Check the stitching where the cinch strap attaches to the ring. It should look solid—not worn or strained. Check the leather at the top of the fenders where they attach to the saddle. All should look solid and in good condition.

If you have wooden [stirrups](http://horses.about.com/od/choosingandusingtack/tp/Learn-About-Stirrups.htm), check them for cracks. On the underside of a western saddle, check how the fleece is attached. Sometimes it's attached with staples or nails. These can lift and poke into your horse's back and cause soreness. And check the cinch itself. There should be no cracks in the rings or buckles. If it's string, all the strands should be in good repair.

On an [English saddle](http://horses.about.com/od/typesofsaddles/g/allpupose.htm), check the [girth](http://horses.about.com/od/understandinghorses/g/girth.htm) straps. The same holes on girth straps tend to be used over, and over and after a time the leather around the holes becomes stretched and worn. Check the stitching at the top of the girth straps—it should look sturdy with no breaks or frays. Check the same areas on stirrup leathers. Also check the bars on which the stirrups hang. If they have a hinge, it should move freely. Check stirrups for cracks. Peacock style stirrups sometimes get bent. While this isn't necessarily as a safety problem, it can make your foot tilt at an uncomfortable angle.

You should check any saddle you buy for a [broken saddle tree](http://horses.about.com/od/choosingandusingtack/qt/saddledefects.htm). If your own saddle has been involved in any sort of accident it should be checked as well.

English girths too, need to be checked. Check all the buckles for cracks. Make sure any leather is soft and supple, with no uncomfortable bends or stiff parts that might pinch the horse. String girths should have no frays or broken strings. Any elastic should be in good condition. Once it gets wavy looking, it means it's lost it stretch and lost some of its strength, and it could be time to have the elastic replaced or get a new girth. Fleece girths should be replaced once the fleece becomes compacted, simply for the comfort of the horse. Synthetic girths too should be checked for signs of wear.

Check the underside of the saddle for any protruding nails or staples—most English saddles won't have any, but it only takes a moment to check and be sure. Also check the flocking or stuffing. Over time, the wool flocking or the foam stuffing can become quite hard and lumpy. This may be uncomfortable for the horse, and it may express its discomfort in poor behavior. Wool flocking can be replaced.

**Bridles**

All the stitching on bridles should be checked for breaks and fraying, whether it's a leather or synthetic bridle. Bits do crack, so check them occasionally for signs of fractures. Some metal mouth pieces wear, so check for thin or sharp areas. Check the leather or synthetic snaps for any wear or tears. Check buckles, snaps and stitching on reins frequently. More than one rider has gotten in a tight spot when a rein broke.

**Halters and Leads**

Replace worn [lead ropes](http://horses.about.com/od/understandinghorses/g/Leadrp.htm) and check snaps. Most snaps on [halters](http://horses.about.com/od/understandinghorses/g/halter.htm) or lead rope can be replaced easily. For turn out, I actually prefer halters that break. That way if a horse gets tangled on a tree branch, gate latch or gets a foot through when scratching their ears with a hind foot as some do, the halter will break easily. In situations where the horse is going to be handled in areas crowded with people or other busy and potentially dangerous environments, use a halter that won't break easily, on which the leather or webbing, rings and buckles are in good shape.

**Helmet**

While it's not really part of your horse's tack, your [helmet](http://horses.about.com/od/Riding_Clothes_and_Helmets/a/ridinghelmetcare.htm) needs to be checked occasionally too. If you've taken a fall and your head hit the ground, it's time to replace the helmet, whether or not you see any damage. Most manufacturers recommend replacing your helmet every three to four years, since the glues and materials they are made of tend to deteriorate over time.

Checking your tack needn't be laborious. Just check occasionally and if anything looks worn or frayed, have it checked by a saddler or harness maker. A stitch in time may not just save nine; it might also save your life.