



Article Side

Choosing the Right Saddle Pad by [Emily Heggan](#)

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When it comes time to purchase your next saddle pad, you can become overwhelmed with many choices. There are several things to consider when choosing a saddle pad such as material, the shape and if you need some type of specialty pad for your horse. Doing some research and investigating what type of pad you may need can help narrow down your choices.

Before you head out to your local tack store or jump online, think about these questions and see what pad is right for you.

What will you be using the pad for? Horse showing or at home?

What type of riding do you do? English or Western?

Does your horse need extra protection, have a sore back or have sway back?

What is your price range?

Types of Saddle Pads

If you go to your local tack store, you can obviously see that there is enough visible evidence to determine that so many different types of saddle pads exist.

English Pads

Contoured saddle pads or shaped pads, are used for English riding and for English competitions such as hunters and equitation. These pads follow the shape and form of the saddle. These contoured pads made specifically to fit the size of your saddle and the purpose, such as all purpose saddles and close contact.

Square saddle pads, on the other hand, are more rectangular in shape and can come thick or thin. These pads are usually used for schooling at home and sometimes used in show jumping competitions. Some square pads also have a rounded shape in the front to fit the shape of the saddle. Square pads are also used in dressage and have a more flat shape in front to fit the shape of the long flaps that dressage saddles have.

If you ride English and your horse needs some extra padding you can look for a half pad, some type of riser pad or wither pad. These types of pads are smaller and only form to the top part of the saddle. Half pads are exactly what they are called. They are like a contoured saddle pad just the top half and they offer extra padding and support for the horse's back. Riser pads are the same shape as half pads but are usually made of foam and have extra padding in the back where the cantle of the saddle sits. Much like riser pads, wither relief pads have extra padding on the part of the pad where the saddle sits on the withers.

Western Pads

Navajo saddle blankets are common in western disciplines. These pads are colorful, have unique patterns and are designed to show off the horse. An airflow pad, a breathable pad lined with holes, can sometimes be placed underneath a pad to create more padding for the horse's back and allow more air under the pad to decrease sweating.

Much like English saddle pads, western pads also come in a contoured shape. A contoured saddle pad is designed for a horse that has a slight dip in their back or one with larger withers. The front part of the contour will relieve pressure from the withers, much like a wither relief half pad.

Western pads can also come with wither relief with the added padding on the withers or extra padding where the back of the saddle rests for those horses with sway back or larger withers. These pads are built up along the center, raising the saddle up off the withers. If your horse does have sway back, you can buy a pad that gradually adds more padding from the outside edges on inward towards the center of the pad.

Purpose of Saddle Pads

Saddle pads and saddle blankets are designed to:

Cushion and add support for the horse's back

Absorb sweat so moisture doesn't cause chaffing or rubbing

Add design for competition

Elevate the saddle

Different horses have different needs. This is why it is best to address what type of pad your may need before you drive off to the store and purchase one. Choose the pad that best suits your horse's needs and your own.

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[Emily Heggan](#) - About Author:

Emily Heggan is a senior at Rowan University majoring in journalism. She currently competes in the 3' hunters with her horse, General, and enjoys writing about equestrian supplies like a [saddle pads](#).

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