

## Safekeeping

# Daily Practices to Avert Injuries

by Ruthann Smith  
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### Leading To Trouble

You see it all the time. But, did you know that casually leading a horse improperly can lead to death? I don't mean to be sensational. It's true. I know two people who have been killed by leading in the latest fashion: with the end of the lead rope tossed over the person's left shoulder while the person walks in front of the horse. In each case, the quiet horse spooked. The lead rope hooked and hurled the person, breaking their neck.

Another seasonal favorite practice is to hold a grazing horse with a lead shank folded back on itself. The horse grazes and stomps at flies. When the hoof sneaks into the chain loop, the horse can break a neck or leg.

Proper leading involves both your body position and organization of the lead rope. Here are some tips for keeping safe.

### Your Body Position

- Always walk at the horse's shoulder. You may need to get your horse accustomed to walking next to you. Initially, cluck and use the end of the lead to scoot him up from behind. Then, build good habits.
- Keep one eye on the horse. The reason you walk at the horse's shoulder is to troubleshoot. There, you can be aware of his concerns and have better leverage to handle problems. If the horse is behind you, it is impossible to anticipate or respond to danger in time. So, stay at the shoulder with one eye on the horse's ear, which will tell you what he is focusing on. Sometimes

averting accidents is as simple as diverting his attention back to you, perhaps by speaking and jiggling the lead.

- If you lead from behind the shoulder, you lose leverage.



PHOTO: LUCKYBRAIDS.COM

While common, this is NOT safe. Always lead from beside the horse's shoulder.



PHOTO: LUCKYBRAIDS.COM

This configuration will help protect the eye from the halter sliding into it.

That is why heels are important: If the horse is getting away from you, dig your heels into the ground. Another way to regain control is with a handy muscle twitch. If you grab the muscle on the neck, just above the point of the shoulder, the horse will suck back. If he is getting away from you, grab the muscle. You can twist it for added impact if necessary. Without needing strength, this technique allows you to regain control, his attention and his respect instantly. Try that twitch. It works as a great eject button when the horse is standing on your foot as well.

### Managing The Lead

- Use two hands. Your right hand should hold the lead a foot below the halter. Your left hand should hold the extra length. If the horse spooks, that second hand is your backup.
- Never wrap. If you wrap the lead around your hand and he bolts, it can tear your fingers off. No joke. Always fold your lead and hold around it – not with your fingers through the center.



*About the author: The lack of healthy and effective grooming products inspired Ruthann Smith, world-class groom and braider, to develop the economical Lucky Braids™ solutions: All-In-One Shampoo, Whitener/Dry Wash enzymatic spray, Handy Salve and braiding products prized by top horsemen. For more grooming tips, please join at: [www.luckybraids.com](http://www.luckybraids.com).*



PHOTO: LUCKYBRAIDS.COM

**This is an accident waiting to happen. The lead is wrapped around fingers. Plus, the horse is already distracted! He could not hold him with that hand position.**

Keeping safe is a matter of consistently following simple rules. So, lead your horse properly to enjoy lots of safe and relaxing times together. ■

- Don't loop. If you don't need a shank, use a lead rope. Or, hook to the bottom ring without creating a dangerous loop for him to put his foot through.
- Knot the end of the lead. If the horse bolts, the lead won't slide through your hand.
- Shank for safety. Better safe than sorry. If your horse is hot, unpredictable, worried or inexperienced, a chain over the nose can help you comfortably keep his attention. However, typically people put the chain over the nose so the halter shifts to hurt the eye. A better option is to twist the chain over the noseband, run it through the ring on the other side, and under the chin to the clasp on the near side cheek ring. Then, the halter does not slide.

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