

Dear Dr. Wise,

Question: We would like to purchase a horse for our daughter to start riding lessons, do you have any recommendations?

Answer: I would suggest prior to buying a horse that your daughter try riding lessons at a local barn so that you can learn more about what kind of horse she will need. This will also help you to determine that your daughter will enjoy the sport well enough to make a financial commitment as big as buying a horse.

The first step in buying a horse is to think about what you want the horse to be able to do. The second step would be to go out and do a “trial ride” where your daughter will try riding the horse to make sure your expectations are met.

Before buying a horse, a pre-purchase exam is recommended if there is a question of whether the horse is potentially painful in a leg (lame) in a way that will make the horse unable to perform the job you are asking for it to do. In this process, often your local veterinarian will perform the pre-purchase exam to help advise you on the health of the horse. This is a very thorough exam where the veterinarian will perform a physical exam to make sure the horse is healthy, followed by a lameness exam where they will watch the horse move to determine if there is any pain that will make the horse limp. Sometimes more tests will be done if the horse is painful. The pre-purchase exam will depend mainly on what you want out of the exam. I advise that you contact your local equine veterinarian to learn what they would recommend for you and your daughter.

It is important to understand that buying a horse is a significant commitment because it takes a lot to keep and maintain a horse properly. After the financial commitment of buying the horse, there are costs in finding a barn to keep (“board”) the horse. In order to keep the horse healthy, regular hoof trimmings by a farrier are recommended. Also, veterinary check-ups are recommended so that your horse can receive the recommended vaccines, get a dental exam and regular dentals, and have a general overall health assessment. The frequency of visits varies with your horse’s needs, your location, and what your horse does for a living. Once you purchase your horse, consult with your local veterinarian about services they offer and what they recommend for routine maintenance your horse.