

# Motherhood and Horseracing



Photo: Hattie Austin



*Before, During & After  
Pregnancy  
Considerations for  
Parents and Employers*



**Racing  
Home**



# This handbook is for **you**, whether you're a parent or an employer...or both.

Welcome to this handbook from the team at Racing Home – we're delighted to have you on board.

In professional sport, including horseracing, the crossroads you reach when your career aspirations meet the reality of becoming a mother presents a unique challenge.

Here at Racing Home, we know that as an athlete, whether you're a jockey, work rider or someone with a physical role within the horseracing industry, women often find themselves navigating the delicate balance between their physical careers and the responsibilities of parenthood.

It doesn't matter whether you're an employee, employer or self-employed. Considering pregnancy, maternity leave, and parental support policies has become increasingly important to ensuring that women in horseracing can thrive both on and off the track. A supportive environment that acknowledges the physical, emotional, and financial aspects of motherhood is vital in enabling women to continue their careers while embracing family life.

This handbook explores various aspects of motherhood in professional equine sport, with a particular focus on pregnancy, maternity, and parental leave. It outlines the considerations for both employers, employees and the self-employed – including jockeys, work riders and stud staff – during different stages of pregnancy, maternity, and beyond.



Additionally, it highlights the mental health and wellbeing needs of women in athletic and physically demanding roles, and the importance of workplace policies that foster inclusivity and support.

The inclusion of suitable provision of **childcare, paternity and shared parental leave, adoption and surrogacy provisions**, and a broader commitment to **mental health** care and wellbeing is essential to creating an equitable environment for all athletes.

By examining what's already in place and drawing attention to the areas where further action is needed, Racing Home aims to safeguard and support the wellbeing of women in the horseracing industry. We will continue to lead the industry in demonstrating how we can create a more inclusive and supportive sporting environment for parents, and **we're here to support you, as and when you need.**

# Considerations before pregnancy (pre-natal)

## Advice for riders and staff

When planning to start a family there are both physical and mental health factors to think about, some of which are unique to riding horses. One factor relating to horseracing may be how you achieve your target weight for riding, particularly if you are having difficulty conceiving: avoiding making weight using excessive exercise, dehydration or very restricted dieting is important.

Your GP will be able to provide general advice prior to conceiving such as taking folic acid, stopping smoking, limiting alcohol intake and reviewing medications.

Remember that you cannot be discriminated against for wanting to start a family, and whether you're a professional athlete or not, you are entitled to job protection and paid maternity leave, just like everyone else. The Racing Home portal has a section on [Rights and Entitlements](#) which may be helpful to have a look at if you have logistical questions.



## Advice for employers

If you're an employer, you must provide organisational flexibility in work and riding schedules, and ensure that any risks associated with physical activity during pregnancy are identified and mitigated. Understanding your legal responsibilities is vital, and a pregnancy policy may be useful for the business.

Clear communication and a supportive approach are essential in fostering an environment where staff feel empowered to make the best decisions for their health and career.



# Considerations during pregnancy (ante-natal)

## Advice for riders and staff

**0-12 weeks:** During the first weeks of pregnancy, if you are feeling well and have no early pregnancy complications, you might choose to continue to ride but you should not be trying to maintain your usual riding/racing weight using excessive exercise, dehydration or dieting.

The Racing Home website has more information about [when you're required to notify your employer that you're pregnant](#), but the benefits of having a conversation with your employer once you feel comfortable – usually after 12 weeks – from a peace of mind, as well as health perspective, should be emphasised. It benefits both parties to create a plan for your next few months and to keep the lines of communication open as honestly and straightforwardly as possible.

In the first trimester you may feel nauseous, and the production of the hormone relaxin, which causes relaxation of the pelvic ligaments, can contribute to pelvic pain in some women. There is more information on the [NHS website](#) about what to expect each week during your pregnancy.

**From 12 to 34 weeks:** It is normal to stop riding at this time and to follow the simple advice "don't bump the bump".

You can continue to exercise unless you have been specifically told not to. Yard duties can be continued if you feel fit and well but care should be taken when around horses as you might find your speed and balance are reduced, putting you at more risk from being injured around horses.

**From 34 weeks onwards:** Consider starting maternity leave if you have not already done so. Keeping physically active is important, following general pregnancy advice.

You may wish to look at the [Racing Home Pregnancy Rehabilitation and Support Programme](#) at this stage – it's free, is open to any woman working in the horseracing industry and provides an opportunity to work with a specialist physiotherapist. Each individual programme includes six sessions with your physio, providing a tailored fitness plan, strength & conditioning support and gym work instruction. Prior to delivery, you will be given advice and exercises, with physio rehabilitation commencing after birth.

It is also important to look after your mental health during pregnancy, and there is advice available on this on the Racing Home portal, as well as links to organisations that will be able to provide specific mental health support if you require it.



# Considerations during pregnancy (ante-natal)

## Advice for employers

As an employer, there are both organisational and legal obligations to be considered.

We would strongly encourage you to be prepared and have a clear ante-natal support policy in place that includes flexible working arrangements, opportunities for medical check-ups, and adjustments to workload to ensure the health of both the employee and their baby. Even if you haven't had an employee fall pregnant before, this is a useful document to have prepared – the team at Racing Home can help with this if necessary so please contact us if you need.

The importance of a clear and accessible maternity policy cannot be overstated, and **help with this is available via the Racing Home portal**, which outlines the framework within which women can expect support during their pregnancy and maternity leave.

Employers should ensure that maternity leave is not only sufficient in duration but that the employee's return to sport is facilitated with careful consideration of their physical recovery and mental wellbeing.

This could also include signposting to maternity support or wellbeing programs that prepare your employees for the physical and emotional changes that will come. Remember that Racing Home is here to support you as an employer, so don't hesitate to contact us if you need.



# Considerations after pregnancy (post-natal)



## Advice for riders and staff

After childbirth, the post-partum period is one of the most challenging for riders and racing staff, as you recover physically and emotionally while caring for your newborn.

This is also a vital time to think about the physical, mental and emotional aspects of now having a baby in your life, which include:

- an awareness of the signs of post-natal depression and where to get help if needs be
- knowing where your confidence levels are, and whether that includes an increased fear of falling or injury
- how you're doing with your weight for riding out and whether you need support with weight gain or loss
- the impact of sleep deprivation and your ability to maximise your sleep
- feeding and nutrition for both you and your child, which are vital for you both

From a logistical perspective, knowing your rights around returning from maternity leave and understanding your childcare options will help facilitate your return to work, as and when you are ready.

## Advice for employers

The importance of women receiving appropriate time off, physical rehabilitation and mental health support to facilitate a healthy return to sport should not be underestimated. The team at Racing Home also recommend **Keeping in Touch Days**, to ensure your staff are still involved in their yard/stud/place of work.

**Breastfeeding** and **childcare needs** should be considered, with support systems in place to help women manage these responsibilities alongside their career.

At Racing Home, the team strongly encourages an **open dialogue** about the challenges of returning to sport after childbirth, helping women feel supported and empowered to return to riding, competition and physical work when ready.

The pregnancy and birth experience, plus people's family support network and access to childcare, can vary considerably so it is vital to treat new parents as individuals. All situations are different.

## Mental Health Support

Pregnancy, maternity leave, and the return to horseracing in any capacity after childbirth can significantly impact an individual's mental health. The mental strain of balancing riding and caring for elite equine athletes with family responsibilities and physical recovery can lead to anxiety, depression, and stress.

It is crucial for those in horseracing to receive comprehensive mental health support during and after pregnancy. Access to counselling, peer support networks, and mental health professionals specialising in sports psychology are critical resources for people navigating this challenging time, and [the Racing Home team are able to signpost services for you if required.](#)



## Paternity Considerations

Paternity leave is equally important in the context of professional sport, allowing fathers to take time to support their partner and adjust to life as a parent. Racing Home has consistently advocated for provision of appropriate leave for fathers, ensuring that they can play an active role in their child's early development while maintaining their professional commitments.



## Shared Parental Leave

The introduction of shared parental leave has enabled more flexibility in how families manage the early stages of parenthood, although uptake is currently low and the team at Racing Home understand that SPL can seem daunting for both employers and employees.

However, shared parental leave enables both parents to share childcare duties, ensuring that women and their partners can work together to provide the best possible environment for their child. Racing Home has collated information on Shared Parental Leave which outlines the structure for both parents to take leave while maintaining their professional commitments.

## Adoption and Surrogacy

Those in horseracing who become parents through adoption or surrogacy face similar challenges to biological parents, and their needs should be equally acknowledged in order to foster a more equitable and supportive environment for all athletes, and to ensure that those who adopt or use surrogacy have the same rights and access to leave as biological parents. As with birth, adoption and surrogacy families are also eligible for shared parental leave.





## Where else can you receive support as either an employee or an employer?



There are multiple organisations in racing that work alongside Racing Home to provide invaluable support for athletes during their recovery from injury and during periods of parental leave. These institutions offer services like counselling, physical rehabilitation, and assistance for athletes transitioning into life after sport. Access to these resources ensures that athletes can focus on their health and wellbeing without compromising their professional aspirations, and they are all linked on the [\*\*Racing Home website.\*\*](#)

## Summary

Creating a supportive and inclusive environment for athletes and participants during pregnancy, maternity, and parental leave is vital to ensuring that professional sports remain accessible and equitable for all. The policies and resources highlighted in this paper provide a foundation for fostering a balanced approach to family life and professional achievement. By continuing to evolve these policies and promoting a culture of support, the sport of horseracing can ensure that all athletes, regardless of gender or parental status, are able to thrive both in their careers and in their roles as parents. With further integration of mental health support, flexible working arrangements, and resources for recovery, the horseracing industry and other elite sports can lead the way in championing motherhood within the professional arena.





# About Women in Racing and Racing Home




**Women in Racing** was created to support and develop women in the sport of horse racing. Established in 2009, their vision is to connect women across the industry, to provide personal development and raise their profiles, and enhance racing as an attractive sector for more women to build their careers. Women in Racing is independent of horse racing bodies but works in partnership with stakeholders to effect positive change.

By supporting women at all stages of their career through opportunities including the mentoring and bursary schemes, Women in Racing has succeeded in creating a culture that promotes and celebrates members across the entirety of the sport and which encourages appointment of senior women at the highest levels in racing.

The **Racing Home project** has as its core objective the improvement of the working lives of parents and carers in the horseracing industry. It seeks to ensure that all employees have an understanding of their basic rights and entitlements and can talk openly about the challenges they experience as a working mother, father, or carer.

Rather than a taboo subject, their needs can be embraced inclusively by racing's employers who will see the benefits of investing in the quality of life of parents, both in terms of retention, a more motivated workforce and overall sustainability. Education is a large part of Racing Home and by leading the way through signposting and highlighting good working practices, Racing Home aims to help make racing more accessible and enjoyable for our participants. This will play a part in transforming a more traditional culture and mindset, thus attracting people from outside the sport to join the racing family.

# Get in touch

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