

Daily Health Checks



You are responsible for your horse's health and it is important to monitor his well being on a daily basis by spending a few minutes checking him over.

Body language

Your horse should appear bright and alert. He should stand with a normal posture; resting a hind leg is often normal, but resting a front leg could be a sign he is lame. When walking he should weight bear equally on each limb and not appear uncomfortable.

If your horse is lying down more than usual, looking at his flanks or rolling repeatedly then this could be a sign that he has colic. Look at the whole stable, if his bedding is unusually disturbed then he may have been showing colic signs before you arrived. Sweating at rest when the weather is not especially warm should also raise concerns.

Physical check

Check your horse's legs over morning and evening for any wounds, bumps, heat or swelling. This is also a good time to check the condition of the hooves and whether all four shoes are intact and in good shape. If you suspect your horse may have a problem but can't see any obvious signs, trot him up on a flat, hard surface to check for lameness.

Check his eyes appear normal with no swelling around them or discharge. Note any coughing or nasal discharge, and assess your horse's breathing pattern and rate. Examine his coat for lumps, scabs or rubbed areas; the hair should appear shiny and healthy.

Appetite and water intake

Loss of appetite is generally a sign that all is not well so if your horse has left his feed and isn't eating his hay it is generally advisable to call the vet. Watch your horse eating and notice whether he is dropping food out of his mouth (quidding) or showing signs of discomfort when chewing.

It is also important to monitor how much water your horse is drinking, Make sure that he always has sufficient water but check whether he is drinking unusually little or large amounts as this can also indicate a problem. If you have any concerns call your vet.

Droppings

Droppings can tell us a lot about what is going on inside our horses. They should be well-formed balls, which are easy to break up, not too dry and not too runny. The appearance of the droppings will vary slightly depending on the horse's current diet. Worms or larvae in the droppings can be a sign of worm burden and you should worm your horse immediately. Long pieces of fibrous material may indicate that the horse is not chewing his food adequately and the teeth should be checked.

Urine

Horses normally pass a moderate quantity of pale yellow or colourless urine several times a day. If the urine is a dark yellow colour with a strong smell then the horse may be dehydrated. The horse should not strain excessively and the urine should be passed in a continuous stream. Mares may pass frequent small quantities of urine when in season; this is normal.

Further checks

If you have any concerns regarding your horse's health then it is often useful to take his temperature. This is achieved by carefully inserting a standard thermometer halfway into the anus and holding it in place for approximately one minute. Take care if your horse kicks. A normal temperature is around 37-38°C; if it is significantly higher it may indicate infection and you should contact your vet.

Your horse's respiratory rate can be counted by watching his flank movements or his nostrils flaring with each breath. When standing quietly the rate should be 8-12 breaths per minute. Any increase in rate, especially if accompanied by unusually large breaths, a cough, nasal discharge or dullness should give concern.

The normal equine pulse rate is 34-44 beats per minute; it can be counted by feeling any artery including the leg vessels (the digital pulse). In general the fitter the horse, the slower the pulse rate tends to be. An increase in the pulse rate can indicate illness, although beware excitement causing a temporary acceleration of the heart rate.