

## **Tips for the New Horse Owner**

### **Basic Feeding Guidelines for Horses**

Every horse has different needs. Ask an expert to help you design a feeding program that is right for your horse.

### **How much hay should I feed?**

Horses require forage as the basis of their diet. Forage can be in the form of grass if the pasture is well managed and large enough (2 acres/horse). Hay should be used to supplement or replace pasture especially in the winter months. You know your horse is getting enough to eat if you can feel his ribs but not see them.

One and one-half to 2 pounds of hay per 100 pounds of body weight is the average amount required per day for each horse. This amount may be less for some “easy keepers” and more for other horses. The average 1,000 pound horse would eat 15-20 pounds (1/3 of a square bale) per day. That means that each horse should be provided with 10 bales of hay per month. If round bales are used, make sure they are of good quality and designed to be fed for horses. Some hay grasses that are well tolerated by cattle can cause severe disease and even death in horses. When purchasing a round bale, ask the approximate weight. If a round bale weighs 500 pounds, it will last 5 horses 5 days if not wasted.

### **What does good quality hay look like?**

Some hay (especially if it is meant for cattle) does not have enough nutrients to keep a horse healthy.

Good quality hay should have:

- Lots of leaves and few stems
- Small diameter stems
- Squeeze it. It should be soft and pliable, with no sharp sticks
- Few seed heads or blooms
- Fresh smell, green color
- Avoid dusty, musty smelling hay
- Clean with no dried leaves, weeds, garbage etc.

### **How much grain should I feed?**

Grain may provide additional energy and calories for horses that are in work, are pregnant or lactating. When adding grain to a forage diet feed the same amount every day. It is best to divide it into 2 feedings. Oats are a simple grain and weighs one pound per quart. If a horse is worked on average 1 hour per day, then a rule of thumb is to feed 1 pound of oats divided into 2 feedings. There are many commercially manufactured horse feeds available in feed stores. Follow the manufacturer’s recommendations on the label. Be sure to store grains in a locked room to avoid accidental over ingestion which can lead to founder, colic or death.

### **How can I safely change the type or amount of grain fed?**

When changing feeds SLOWLY increase the amount of grain or supplement (i.e. one-half pound per animal per day maximum increase). If starting a pelleted feed, add enough water to it to make it soft to prevent choke. Changes in hay do not present many problems.

### **Can I feed cattle feed to my horses?**

No. Many cattle feeds contain Rumensin, lincocin or tetracyclines. These antibiotics can be fatal to a horse.

### **How much water does a horse drink?**

An adult horse will drink 10 to 20 gallons per day and more when it is hot or they are consuming dry forage. All horses need clean, good-quality water at all times. Outdoor water troughs should be cleaned at least every couple of weeks to remove debris and algae. Stall water buckets should be emptied and rinsed daily. Check automatic water systems daily, as they could malfunction and not be providing adequate amounts of water. Be sure to break ice on water during winter months or heat the water.

### **Does my horse need salt?**

Yes. Salt is best provided in a plain salt block especially if he is getting a commercial feed that contains minerals. Place the block out of the rain. If a mineral block is given, add a plain salt block also. A 5 lb. salt block should last an average horse 2 months.

### **What other care does my horse need?**

Other factors to consider are foot trimming or shoeing every five to eight weeks by an experienced farrier. The feet should be picked out daily to prevent thrush.

A veterinarian will help you decide when is the best time to deworm (at least 2-4 times per year) and vaccinate your horse. The horse will need yearly vaccinations. At a minimum these should include rabies, eastern equine encephalitis, western equine encephalitis, tetanus and West Nile virus. Your veterinarian can help you determine if other vaccines are recommended.

Horse's teeth will develop sharp points. A veterinarian can determine if they should be "floated" or filed.

### **Daily Horse Chores to Protect Your Horse's Health**

These are daily tasks you can and should be doing to help maintain your horse's health. They are simple daily "chores" that are part of good horsemanship. They can go a long way in managing a healthy horse, detect early problems, and prevent serious issues.

Check on your horse(s) twice daily, morning and evening.

1. Check that your horse is walking normally-not lame or wobbly. Make him walk if he are just standing around. Listen to his footfalls for lameness.
2. Check that your horse is interested in food-grain and/or hay.
3. Inspect his entire body for cuts/blood/swelling-make sure all four legs are normal looking. Pay attention to the joints and tendons.
4. Check for nasal discharge. Clear discharge is normal. Anything else is not.
5. Take off the fly mask and inspect both eyes. They should be open and have no discharge. A horse with a squinty eye is an emergency for the vet.
6. Observe your horse for normal behavior. They should not be hiding or droopy looking.
7. Check for lost or sprung shoes on all shod feet.
8. Check to be sure the blanket is in place and secured in winter. It must be taken off daily to check the weight and look for coat, and skin issues.

9. Check feed buckets to make sure they have eaten.
10. Make sure water is available and clean. Would you drink it?
11. Check manure consistency (diarrhea or hard is NOT normal).
12. Check appearance of stalls for signs of rolling/pawing/distress.

It is easy to determine all of the above while feeding. If it is dark, don't forget to turn on lights and use a flashlight. If your horse does not eat any grain, use some chopped hay, safe treats or a small handful of grain to train them to come up for inspection.

If any of these things are abnormal, call your veterinarian to find out what you should do.

## **Barn Safety**

1. **Fire:** Have your local fire department inspect your barn. Keep electric cords and outlets (this includes fans) out of reach of your horse. Install smoke detectors. Do not use heaters of any kind. Store hay properly.
2. **Feed:** Keep feed in a separate room or stall and keep it locked. Feed should be kept in a cool mouse proof area. Feed should be inspected daily for mold and spoilage.
3. **Hay:** Hay should be stored in a cool area out of the sun and rain that is well ventilated. It should also be kept free of rodents and other disease carrying (EPM) animals. It should not be stored in the loft. This is very unhealthy for your horse's respiratory system. Hay should be inspected for dust and mold as it is fed.
4. **Stall:** Stalls should be kept clean, dry and well ventilated. Clean daily. Ammonia and dust are a major cause of heaves (lung problem) in horses. Inspect stalls for sharp objects such as nails, wood and loose boards often.
5. **Water:** Keep troughs clean and insect free. Mosquito's breed in standing water which can carry West Nile Virus and encephalitis.
6. **Walkways:** Keep clutter to a minimum. Many horses get cut on everyday items when they become spooked, such as muck tubs, wheel barrows and pitch forks. Remove everything from aisle way, walkways, wash stalls and doorways that are not necessary.
7. **Walkway surfaces:** Make sure walkway surfaces are not slippery, especially in a wash stall. Use mats and stone as needed. Make sure aisles are not dusty and hose down as needed.
8. **Run-in Shed:** Keep sheds mucked out and free of stinging insects nests.
9. **Fencing:** Only horse safe fencing should be used. This includes 3 and 4 board fencing, 2X4 no climb with a top rail or 2-3 strands electric tape. High tension, barbed wire in any fashion and cow 4X4 fencing is all inappropriate fencing for horses. Inappropriate fencing can cause severe lacerations that can be expensive, career ending and life threatening. Gates should be used and kept closed especially if your property exits onto a busy road.
10. Muddy areas should be filled in with stone. Common areas that can become deep are around water troughs, in front of sheds, near gates and other loafing areas. Mud and deep areas can cause hoof abscesses, dermatitis and are fly hatcheries. Standing water is also a mosquito breeding ground.

11. **Manure:** Manure should not be directly spread onto your fields. It needs to be composted first to kill parasite eggs before field application. Manure should not be composted near a stream, pond or other water source.
12. **Pasture:** Proper fencing and gates should be used. Do not use cattle guards. Check for ground hog holes and fill in/exterminate. Keep pasture bush hogged. Tall grass and weeds can cause more weed over growth and eye irritation. It can also harbor ticks and cause skin problems on the lower legs. No equipment (tractors etc) or junk should be left in the field.
13. **Pools-** All pools on horse properties need to be fenced with horse proof fencing. Horses can drown if they fall in a pool, since they cannot get out. A covered pool is even more dangerous, as they get tangled in the cover.
14. **Posted information:** In case a neighbor or Good Samaritan sees something amiss on your farm, emergency information should be posted in a conspicuous spot. It should include your name(s) and contact information, backup name and contact information and veterinarian names and contact information. The address of premises and directions to it can help in an emergency.
15. **Poisoning prevention:** All chemicals and poisons should be kept out of the barn and in a locked area. Educate your neighbors about the risk of feeding your horses inappropriate feed such as grass clippings. Avoid planting poisonous trees and shrubs such as red maple trees, cherry tree's, oleander, and mountain laurel. Investigate any fertilizer or pesticides being used on your pasture.

### **Cold Weather Tips**

Continue turnout unless it is very icy. In deep snow, older horses or horses with lameness or neurologic issues may need to be kept in, or have limited turnout.

1. Try to provide a water source that is warmed and convenient for them to reach. If not warmed, REMOVE ice from troughs and buckets at least 2 times a day. Do not rely on streams for water in the winter.
2. Put salt on feed and hay to encourage them to drink.
3. Cut grain if they are going to be in or not moving around much. Do not increase grain!
4. DO NOT OVER FEED HAY. Feed the normal amount only. You can increase after 5-7 days gradually.
5. Monitor manure production if possible. If not passing manure, decrease food offered drastically.
6. If in a stall, hand walk 10 min/2-3 times a day in available areas.
7. Monitor alpha/head horse(s) for bullying, remove if guarding water, feed or shelter.
8. Do not close up the barn. Keep at least some windows or doors open for ventilation.
9. In an ice storm, keep horses in until the ice has melted. If they must be out, provide traction with manure, shavings, ashes, hay or sand. Remove shoes or tape feet with elastikon for traction.
10. Make sure your emergency medications are on hand.

## Horse Health

Checklist for maintaining your horse's health:

### General care:

Balanced Nutrition \_\_\_\_\_  
Fresh Water \_\_\_\_\_  
Exercise \_\_\_\_\_  
Adequate Shelter \_\_\_\_\_  
Grooming \_\_\_\_\_  
Hoof trimming/shoeing every 4-8 weeks \_\_\_\_\_  
TICK preventative monthly \_\_\_\_\_

### Veterinary Care:

Physical examination every 6-12 months \_\_\_\_\_  
Parasite check every 12 months \_\_\_\_\_  
Deworming program \_\_\_\_\_  
Vaccination Program (Especially Tetanus) \_\_\_\_\_  
Coggins Test every 12 months \_\_\_\_\_  
Dental Exam every 6-12months \_\_\_\_\_  
Performance horses should have periodic  
Exams for lameness \_\_\_\_\_  
Monitoring of health problems \_\_\_\_\_  
Geriatric horses should receive additional  
Screening tests \_\_\_\_\_

## Vital Signs of the Horse

Practice taking your horses vital signs when your horse is NORMAL! Get to know what is normal for your horse. This will help you assess their health if they should become sick or injured.

	<b>Normal</b>	<b>Abnormal</b>
Temperature	98.0-101.5 <sup>0</sup> F	>101.5 <sup>0</sup> F
Pulse	28-40 beats/min	>44 beats/min
Respiration	6-10 breaths/min	>15-20 bpm
Mucous membranes	pale pink Pink Moist CRT<2.5 sec	Red Purple Blue/brown Dry

## Veterinary Care

Every horse should have regular veterinary care. At the least, horses should have their teeth checked for sharp points and receive vaccinations once a year (Rabies, Tetanus, Eastern and Western Equine Encephalitis and West Nile Virus). They also need to be on a deworming program that is prescribed by your veterinarian. See the appendix for a yearly calendar you can use to keep track of your horse's veterinary care.

### Adult Horse Vaccination & Deworming Schedule



		Spring Vaccines				Fall Vaccines							
		January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Vaccinations	EW Encephalitis	1X / year		X						X			
	Tetanus	1X / year		X						X			
	West Nile Virus	1X / year		X						X			
	Flu/Rhino	2X / year		X						X			
	Rabies	1X / year		X						X			
	PHF (Optional)	1-2x/year		X						X			
Dental Exam	1 - 2X / year			X									
Deworming	Low Shedder			Q			2X stongid				Q		
	High shedder/young horse	S		I		I		T		PP or Q		I	
Fecal Exam for oval / eggs				YES							YES		

#### Dewormer Key:

I = Ivermectin (Rotectin 1<sup>®</sup>, Zimectin<sup>®</sup>, Equalen<sup>®</sup>, Equell<sup>®</sup>, Ivomec<sup>®</sup>, Promectin<sup>®</sup>)

S = Strongid (Pyrantel Pamoate)

T = Double Dose Strongid<sup>®</sup> (Pyrantel Pamoate), Zimectrin Gold<sup>®</sup> or Equimax<sup>®</sup> - (For Tapeworms)

PP= 5 consecutive days of double dose of Fenbedazole<sup>®</sup> (Panacure<sup>®</sup>, Safeguard<sup>®</sup>) - For encysted strongyles.

Q = Quest<sup>®</sup> (Moxidectin)

\*Note: Quest<sup>®</sup> should only be used in adult (over the age of 3) full sized non pregnant horses.

\*\* Notes: Generic dewormers are fine to use. RMES does NOT recommend the use of daily dewormer without consultation.

\*\*\*Note: This vaccination program was adapted from the recommendations of the American Association of Equine Practitioners ([www.aaep.org](http://www.aaep.org)).

## **When to Call the Vet**

Sometimes veterinary attention cannot wait. If your horse is displaying any of the signs below, call your veterinarian immediately.

1. Your horse is not eating like normal.
2. Signs of colic: decreased appetite, laying down excessively, pawing, looking at flanks, rolling, panting/sweating and above. (See next page)
3. Eye(s) is swollen, held shut, tearing, and color change.
4. Diarrhea
5. Reluctance to walk
6. Bleeding from nose or mouth, feed from nose
7. Limping at walk or trot
8. Laceration/cut/wound
9. Cough/difficulty breathing
10. Significant swelling
11. Hoof puncture-DO NOT REMOVE item

## **Common Horse Ailments**

### **Colic**

Colic is the signs a horse shows when it has pain in its abdomen. The cause can be benign or it can be life threatening. Colic is an emergency and should always be evaluated and treated by a veterinarian.

#### **What does it look like?**

##### **(In order of severity)**

1. No appetite-not eating
2. Pawing with front leg(s)
3. Flamen-lifting upper lip
4. Frequent urination or defecation
5. Kicking belly with hind leg(s)
6. Getting up and down
7. Sweating with any of these signs
8. Rolling
9. Straining to urinate or defecate
10. Laying down excessively
11. Shaking
12. Will not get up/ non responsive

#### **What to do in case of colic**

1. Do not panic
2. Take your horse's temperature, pulse and respiratory rates (TPR).
3. Call your veterinarian.
4. Take your horse on a short walk if it is not frantic.
5. If the horse is very painful, try to walk it, but keep yourself safe. A small paddock may be the safest place to put them.
6. If the horse wants to lie down quietly, allow them to do so.
7. Administer medication only if directed by a veterinarian.
8. If the horse will not be seen by a veterinarian, do not feed hay or grain. He may eat grass after medication. Do not feed grain next 24-36 hours.
9. Review deworming schedule with your veterinarian.
10. Perform a fecal exam for ova (eggs).
11. Discuss horses that colic more than once or twice with your veterinarian.



## Laminitis

Every day veterinarians across the country see hundreds of cases of laminitis, a painful disease that affects the feet of horses. While the exact mechanisms by which the feet are damaged remain a mystery, certain precipitating events can produce laminitis. As a horse owner, it is important to recognize the signs of laminitis and seek veterinary help immediately.

Signs of *acute* laminitis include the following:

- Lameness, especially when a horse is turning in circles; shifting legs when standing
- Heat in the feet-often hard to feel
- Increased digital pulse behind the fetlock
- Pain in the toe region when pressure is applied with hoof testers
- Reluctant or hesitant gait, as if “walking on eggshells”
- A “sawhorse stance,” with the front feet stretched out in front to alleviate pressure on the toes and the hind feet “camped out” or positioned farther back than normal to bear more weight
- Goose stepping with hind legs

If you suspect laminitis, consider it a medical emergency and notify your veterinarian immediately. The sooner treatment begins, the better the chance for recovery.



