

Recognizing the healthy horse

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Keep in mind...

All have horses have personalities....

- Some are higher strung
- Some are more nervous
- The way they react to internal and external stimuli will vary



Beginning an examination

How content/alert is the horse

- Contented horses generally display calmness and alertness
- At any given time a horse may be dozing
- The horse's state will depend on it's routine



Beginning an examination

When observing the horse, one must note:

- Eyes
- Ears
- Posture
- Movement
- Other signs of irritability



Beginning an examination

Vital signs

- Temperature
- Pulse
- Respiration
- Mucous membranes
- Capillary refill time
- Skin pliability



Vital Signs

Temperature

- Average temperature is 100 to 101.5
- Temperatures of foals may be higher
- Factors that may affect temp:
 - Time of day
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Wind and precipitation
 - Level and intensity of activity



Pulse

- Foals will have higher pulse and respiration rates
- Normal pulse and respiration rates:
 - 45 to 60 beats per minute
 - 8 to 15 breaths per minute
- Fitness level has strong effect
- Respiration rate < pulse rate
 - “inversion” – can be a serious problem



Pulse

- Foals (70-120 bpm)
- Yearlings (45-60 bpm)
- 2yr. olds (40-50 bpm)
- Older horses (45-60 bpm)



Mucous membranes

- Inner eyelids
- Inside of the nostril
- Inner lips and gums

- Should be bright and moist/clear pink color
- Should not be dry or sticky
- Make note of unusual odors



Capillary refill time

- Firmly press the thumb against the upper gum for a couple seconds
- Should appear white, but return to normal color in approx 2 seconds
- If it takes longer than 3 seconds, check for dehydration



Skin pliability

- Pinch the skin on the side of the neck between the thumb and forefinger
- Skin should feel pliable, not leathery
- No sign of the fold should be apparent after 3 seconds



Other parameters – Body Fluids

Feces

- Adult horse should produce 28 – 50 pounds of fecal matter in 24 hr period
- 8 – 10 times per day
- Blood indicates a severe inflammation
- A dark, nearly black color occurs when the origin of the blood is in the anterior part of the digestive tract
- A red color is evident when the posterior part of the bowel is affected



Other parameters – Body Fluids

Urine

- Rarely clear
- Usually pale but can be a reddish yellow and still be normal
- 5 – 7 times in 24 hr period
- The amount will vary 4 – 7 quarts



Other parameters – Body Fluids

Urine

- A distinct red color is sign of bleeding in the urinary tract
- A brownish color-green color is an indicator of jaundice and liver problems
- A dark brown coffee-colored urine is diagnostic for azoturia



Other parameters – Body Fluids

Tears

- Moisture is important for protecting exterior surfaces of the horse's eye
- Any obstruction will cause the tears to spill over and run down the face
 - May produce scalding, loss of hair in this area and may attract flies



Other parameters – Body Fluids

Sweat

- Will sweat freely if there is a serious compromise in respiration, if they are excited, and from ambient heat and work
- Horse may sweat profusely from extended exercise
- Some may lose their ability to sweat



Other parameters – Body Fluids

Saliva

- Function is to moisten the food to help with mastication and lubricate the upper digestive tract
- Certain drugs, a variety of plants, defective teeth, foreign bodies, and some diseases will produce excess salivation
- A partial or complete blockage in the esophagus will cause regurgitation food and saliva from the nostrils



Movement

Should move in a cadenced manner
No jerky movements
Length of stride should be uniform
Will vary from breed to breed



Hair coat

- Slick and shiny vs. poor hair coat
- Considerations
 - Season of the year
 - Whether the horse lives outside
 - Grooming practices
 - Parasite control
 - Medical history
 - Feeding program/nutritional supplements



Hoof condition

Ideally the hoof should be:

- Hard, with a slick waxy appearance
- Free of growth or fever rings
- The coronary band should not be dry and leathery
- The frog should be firm and slightly pliable
- Should be no odor or discharge


