

GENERAL HEALTH & ROUTINE CARE



As well as knowing what to look for in healthy horses, it's important to get to know what's normal for your individual horse. Some horses can exhibit slightly different signs or behaviours, but if you know this is still normal for them then it doesn't need to become a worry.

Any change in a horse's physical health or behaviour needs to be monitored carefully as it could be indicative of a developing problem.

What should I be looking for?

Alert and Interested

Horses should be alert and interested in their surroundings. Most horses will raise their head and look towards any general activity in their immediate environment. Horses that look withdrawn, have separated themselves away from the herd in the field or are stood looking dull or disinterested, particularly with their head held low, may indicate a problem.

Clean and Clear

A horse's eyes and nose should be clean and free from any discharge. Discharge from one or both nostrils may be a sign of illness. Horses should be comfortable to open their eyes fully, a half-closed or watering eye is cause for concern.

Mobility

Your horse should be able to move freely, able to weight bear evenly on all four legs and not have any obvious injuries.



Horses should be relaxed but alert and interested in their surroundings.

Normal Vital Signs for Adult Horses

Temperature - 37-38° C

Heart Rate - 36-40 beats per minute

Respiration Rate - 8 – 15 breaths per minute

It's good to know your horse's normal temperature, heart rate and respiration rate.

Practise taking readings for these when your horse is well so you have a guide to what's normal for them. They will soon become used to you doing this, so it won't be new when they're feeling unwell.

Taking your horse's temperature if they seem unwell can help you give your vet as much information as possible when asking for advice.

Body Care

Your horse should be eating and drinking as normal. Horses would normally spend up to 18 hours a day grazing if given the choice and will drink up to 55 litres of water a day. They also need to be able to pass urine and faeces as normal. Urine should be a pale yellow colour. Droppings can vary a little in colour from light brown to dark brown/dark green depending on your horse's diet but should be of a firm, but not hard consistency.

Body condition

Horses should be a healthy weight. This means well covered, but not fat. You should be able to easily feel your horse's ribs but not see them. Use our handy guide to Body Condition Scoring to help assess your horse's body condition.

Coat and Skin

Horses' coats can vary significantly at different times of the year and a winter coat may appear coarser and less shiny than a summer coat. However, at all times of the year the coat should look healthy, not dull, and lie flat against the body. The skin should be clear and supple, without excessive scurf or abrasions.

Daily Care

There are several horse care activities that need to be done each day.

- Horses need to be attended regularly and checked at least twice a day.
- Take the time to observe the horse for a while each day. This will make it easier to spot any abnormalities in health or behaviour.
- Catching a horse every day gives you the opportunity to physically check them over and make sure they seem healthy and content.



Horses should be eating and drinking as normal.

- Grooming your horse is a great way to build a relationship with the horse and allows you to feel over the body for any unusual lumps, new injuries or skin problems. Take your time when grooming and take note of your horse's response to being brushed or touched, unusual sensitivity may be an indicator of pain or soreness.
- Foot care is very important and even if the horse is kept in a field they should have their feet picked out every day. Check the condition of all parts of the hoof and the shoes (if the horse is shod) and pay particular attention to whether there are any cracks appearing or stones lodged in the hoof.



Be sure to pick out your horse's feet at least daily.

Routine Care

Dental Care

Horses' teeth need to be checked regularly by your vet or an equine dental technician (EDT). If you're using an EDT, make sure they are fully registered with the British Association of Equine Dental Technicians (BAEDT). This can be checked on their website.

Many horse owners have their horse's teeth checked annually. However it's important to take your vet's advice on this. This is especially important if your horse has specific dental problems as these may need careful and more frequent monitoring by a vet.

Vaccinations

Equine influenza ('flu) and tetanus are the most common diseases for owners to vaccinate their horses against. Your vet can help you decide whether additional vaccinations are appropriate for your horse and some even send out reminders for when your horse's vaccinations are due. It's important not to let them go overdue, as this may mean you'll need to restart the course in order for your horse to be properly protected. If this happens it will incur additional costs for you and extra injections for your horse.



Make sure your horse has clean and clear eyes and nostrils.

Farrier

Regular foot care from a professional is very important. You can find a registered farrier on the Farriers Registration Council website. If your horse is shod, then they'll need to be visited by a registered farrier around every six weeks. This interval varies from horse to horse depending on the level of work and health of the individual horse's feet. Even companion horses who are unshod need to be visited regularly. This can be six to ten weeks.

Once again, this depends on the individual horse. Your farrier will advise you on the appropriate interval for your horse.



For more welfare advice please visit...
[mareandfoal.org/horse-advice](https://www.mareandfoal.org/horse-advice)
or scan the QR code

www.mareandfoal.org

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