

ADVICE ON

Essential Health Care Requirements



The British Horse Society
Registered Charity No. 237094



GENERAL HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Caring for a horse or pony requires a good basic knowledge, practical experience and plenty of dedication.

The way in which you keep your horse and the manner in which you care for it, affects both its health and well being whether it is a hot blooded Thoroughbred or fluffy family pony.

In addition to providing for a horse's basic needs, consideration needs to be given to any special requirements, as dictated by its age, breed and the work it is doing.

All horses and ponies have the same basic needs. These needs include: readily accessible water and an appropriate diet to maintain health and vigour; the prevention of injury, parasite infestation and disease; adequate comfort and shelter; freedom from stress and fear; freedom of movement and the opportunity to exercise the most normal patterns of behaviour in

the company of other animals.

Horse keepers should know the normal behaviour of their horses and recognise the signs that indicate good health. These include: good appetite and firm droppings, alertness, good body and coat condition, and the absence of injury or lameness.

Horses should be inspected regularly and particular attention should be paid to their feet and body condition. When a horse appears unwell, the cause of the horse's ill health should be identified and the necessary care and treatment given to restore it back to good health. Veterinary advice should be obtained if the horse appears to be ill or in pain; where the cause of any deterioration is not clear or if initial first aid treatment is not effective. Early veterinary advice is essential in all but the most minor problems. Delaying seeking advice may prolong the problem or even make the condition worse.

BASIC FEEDING REQUIREMENTS

When devising any feeding or management regime for a horse or pony it is essential to assess the body condition. Body condition is basically an assessment of how fat or thin an animal is. A horse or pony said to be in 'good' condition, when viewed from behind, has a rounded but not heart shaped rump (i.e. no gutter or groove in the spine). Ribs should be able to be felt, but not seen. A horse or pony should be fit not fat, and lean not thin.

Horses can rapidly deteriorate in body condition as a result of neglect or lack of nutrients, thereby becoming weak and thin. Lack of nutrients may be due to insufficient quality or quantity of feed, serious illness or disorders affecting the horse's ability to utilise food (i.e. bad teeth or severe worm burden). Horses in

poor body condition are susceptible to illness and in severe cases of malnutrition there is impaired function of the main organs of the body, which may result in irreversible liver damage or kidney failure. Horses must regain lost weight gradually in order to allow their digestive system to adapt.

At the other end of the scale horses and ponies assessed at condition scores 4 (overweight) and 5 (obese) are of equal concern. Horses, which are excessively overweight or obese are susceptible to conditions such as laminitis, heart conditions and general poor health. Obese horses and ponies should be put on a restricted controlled diet, but must not be starved.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARASITES

All horses and ponies are susceptible to worms and require preventative control. If left untreated with a significant worm burden, a horse will not only lose condition but serious internal damage may be caused

resulting in colic and other disorders (For further information please read the BHS advisory leaflet on Worm Control).

Worms

Worms can be controlled by a combination of strategic worming, (using suitable products at the right time) and effective pasture management. All horses that graze together should be wormed at the same time using the same product. Pasture management; rotation

and rest of grazing, prevention of over grazing and the removal of droppings can significantly reduce the potential worm problem. This is particularly important where paddocks are intensively grazed.

Even horses kept exclusively in stables or on their own require a regular worm control programme. An appropriate worming regime for your horse should be discussed with a veterinary surgeon.

Grooming provides the ideal opportunity for early identification of external parasites and skin conditions.

(For further information read the BHS Guide to Horse Care and Welfare booklet). Parasites and skin problems can affect any horse or pony and lead to health problems. Those animals which are already in poor health or condition (i.e too thin or too fat) are at greater risk as their natural resistance to disease may be impaired.

Flies

Flies can cause a great deal of irritation especially during the summer. Bot flies lay eggs mainly on horses' legs. When these eggs hatch they form larvae which

burrow in the skin of the face and mouth and eventually end up in the stomach in large numbers causing ulceration, loss of condition and colic.

Lice

Lice are a common cause of itching and discomfort to the horse. A horse with a lice infestation will rub and bite itself creating bald and sore patches. Treatment for lice should be sought from a veterinary surgeon as

soon as the condition is identified. All horses on the same yard or sharing the same field should be checked and treated accordingly.

Rain Scald

Rain Scald is a skin infection caused by prolonged exposure to rain and wet conditions. To prevent such conditions occurring adequate shelter and rugs should

be provided. Rugs should be breathable and taken off and aired daily

Mud Fever

Mud Fever is caused by constant wetting of the skin and irritation from adherent mud that eventually leads

to infection. Veterinary advice should be sought regarding suitable treatment and management.

Ringworm

Ringworm is a contagious fungal infection of the skin. The disease is spread by direct contact, so it is recommended that infected animals are immediately isolated on identification of the infection. Ringworm is potentially infectious to humans, so great care must be

taken when dealing with infected animals. Veterinary advice should be sought for effective treatment and management of the condition. All the horses on the same yard should be checked and treated as necessary.

Sweet Itch

Sweet itch is an allergic skin disease that leads to intense irritation around the mane and tail when the horse is bitten by midges. Immediate veterinary advice

should be sought to determine a suitable treatment and preventative method for dealing with the condition.

OTHER SERIOUS DISEASES

Strangles is a highly infectious disease. Classical symptoms include, swollen glands in the throat, coughing, runny nose and lethargy. If strangles is suspected veterinary advice should be sought immediately. All horses on the same yard or in contact with the infected horse should be isolated immediately to prevent further spread of the disease.

Diseases and viruses such as strangles can spread rapidly. Many have incubation periods, which means there are no immediate clinical signs. It is good practice to take precautionary measures to reduce the risk of

spreading such diseases and viruses. All horses entering the yard that have been stabled or kept away from the yard should be isolated for at least a week. This will allow time for most horses to show signs of ill health if they have contracted any diseases. If you suspect that one of your horses is showing signs of ill health it is advisable to isolate the horse or horses immediately and seek veterinary advice.

Every owner should know the signs and symptoms of the most common ailments such as colic, laminitis, lymphangitis and lameness.

COMMON AILMENTS

Colic

Colic is a vague term applied to the symptoms of abdominal pain, which can vary in degrees of severity and seriousness. Colic can be caused by a number of factors including, stress, eating too quickly, change in diet, exercising too soon after food and a whole range of serious disorders of the intestine. Symptoms of

colic can include; the horse turning to look at its flanks/sides, sweating, repeated lying down and getting up and irregular breathing patterns. If colic is suspected it is advisable to call your vet immediately as complications may occur.

Laminitis

Laminitis is an inflammation in the inner sensitive structure of the hoof. There are many causes of laminitis, the most common form is seen in obese animals. This condition should be treated as an emergency and your vet should be called immediately. Laminitis causes excruciating pain and if not treated promptly and correctly can lead to irreversible damage. Classic symp-

ptoms of laminitis include, the horse standing with its front feet out in front of it, its hind feet tucked under its body and very reluctant to move, or in worse cases lying down and reluctant to stand. There is typically a bounding pulse between the fetlock and the hoof, but unless you know what is normal you may not be able to determine if it is abnormal.

Lymphangitis

Lymphangitis is a condition, which is commonly seen in stabled horses, the main symptom is swelling of the hind legs. In severe cases swelling can extend from hoof to thigh. Lymphangitis is usually caused by long

periods of stabling with little or no turnout or exercise and excessive food. Veterinary advice should be sought if this condition is suspected.

Lameness

There are many causes of lameness in horses from bruising to a strain or sprain, to laminitis. Lameness can be identified by a change in the horse's natural gait, which is usually supported by swelling and heat or pain on examination of the limbs or hooves. If lameness is suspected in the hoof, then you should seek advice from your farrier or vet. If lameness is suspected as a result of injury or problem in the limbs then your vet should be contacted.

The structure of the hoof is very complex and a site

for many potential problems. In order to maintain soundness of the horse, it is essential that the hooves are well looked after. As part of a daily routine, the horse's hooves should be thoroughly picked out at least once to examine for injuries or other abnormalities, and to make sure no stones have become lodged in the hoof which can cause bruising and discomfort. Veterinary or farriery advice should be sought if there are signs of abnormalities in the feet such as excessive heat, bruising or lameness.



HOOF CARE

Hooves grow rapidly especially in young (growing) horses and require regular trimming, at least every 8 weeks. If the hoof is left to over-grow, problems will occur, such as cracking. Horses should be re-shod approximately every 6 weeks; a failure to do so can result in discomfort to the horse, caused by the shoes pinching. Loose shoes and risen clenches require immediate attention from the farrier to prevent possible injury.

Some horses for various reasons have poor quality hooves and require specialist shoeing and remedial farriery. To prevent poor hoof quality it is essential that regular farriery visits are made. A dietary supplement to help hoof growth and quality may be required.

Advice should always be sought from your farrier or vet as to which supplement to use.

Tooth care is all too frequently neglected, with the animal potentially suffering from discomfort or malnutrition as a result. Horses and ponies should have their teeth checked regularly by either your vet or a registered equine dental technician, to identify and correct potential problems.

Youth horses, especially those who are commencing their training, require frequent checking, ideally every six to twelve months to ensure that their teeth are erupting and coming into wear correctly.

TOOTH CARE

Adult horse's teeth should also be inspected regularly (bi-annually and preferably annually) for signs of abnormal wear and other dental problems. Gums and teeth may become damaged or food may become trapped resulting in inflammation, infection and ulceration. When the horse is in its mature years (15+), its teeth will require more frequent attention to ensure that the horse is not in discomfort. It is important for the inspection to be routine to prevent or arrest problems in the early stages, rather than only taking action as a last resort when the horse has lost weight due to

the inability to eat properly.

Horses with worn or abnormal teeth are unable to chew their food properly, resulting in poor digestion. Common signs of this are: food not being chewed properly; dropping food out of the mouth when the horse is eating (called "quidding"); poor condition and lack of energy and mouthing problems when being ridden (for further information see a BHS Guide to Horse Care and Welfare).

VACCINATIONS

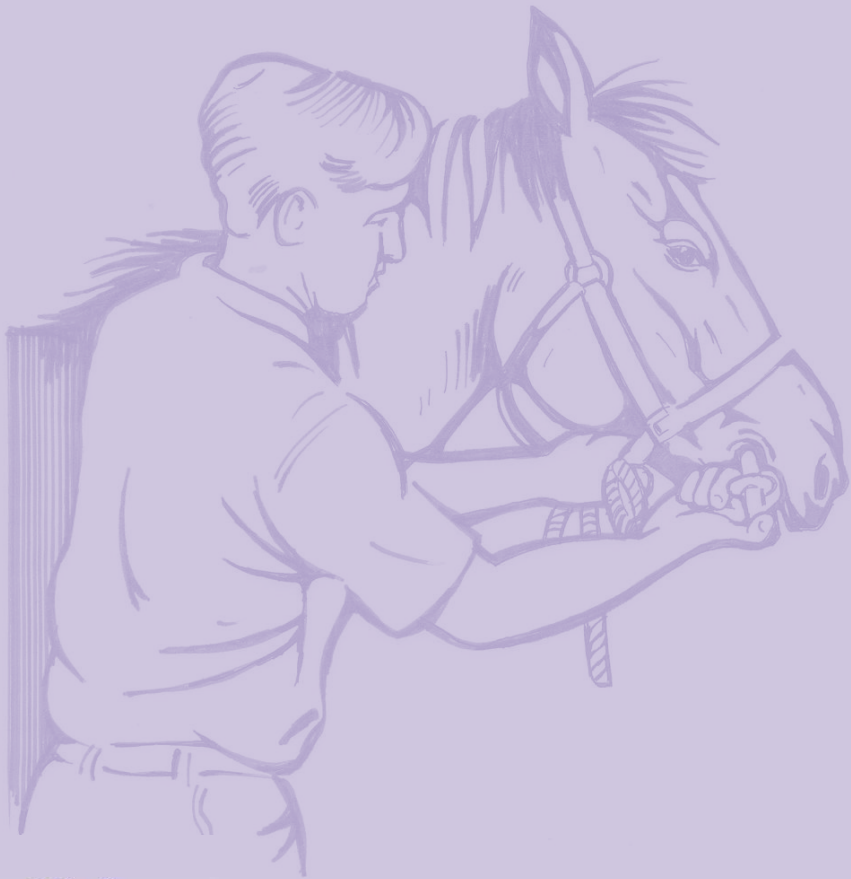
The health of the horse should be safeguarded by appropriate use of preventative measures, such as routine parasitic control and vaccination. Veterinary advice

should be sought with regard to implementing and maintaining an effective vaccination programme (see the BHS advisory leaflet on Vaccinations)

... AND FINALLY

When you own or care for a horse or pony you never stop learning. By providing for the animal's needs and being aware of all the factors that may affect its health, you will be better able to deal with any situations which arise helping to ensure a happy, healthy horse. You should always know when to call a vet or when to seek advice from other professional or knowledgeable and experienced people.

You are not alone in caring for your horse you are part of a team. That team consists of your vet, your farrier, your nutritionist, your riding instructor, often your friends and family and last but not least The British Horse Society who are just a phone call away to offer support and advice on your queries or concerns.



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