

# Horse Care

## Homes

Each horse ideally should have ½ acre to call their own. Horses are social animals and are most happy when they have the ability to roam, run and interact with other horses.

If place is limited, then try to make a turnout, whereby they have a place to run. If horse is stalled, be mindful of providing socialization and enrichment opportunities.

If the horse is put out to pasture, then make certain they have access to a safe shelter.

Fencing is very important for their safety, so make certain it is the proper wire, wood, or metal.

## Feed

A horse's digestive system is designed to digest meals at least twice a day. The diet for an average horse is 20 pounds of food a day. The basic diet for horses is good quality hay, free from mold. Grass hay is often less dusty than alfalfa hay, so it is a good choice for horses that have respiratory issues.

If a horse has little or no teeth, it is important to make mash for them. Mash can consist of wheat bran, rice bran, whole grain oats, alfalfa pellets, timothy pellets, shredded beet pulp, and other ingredients like lysine, kelp, selenium and vitamin E, and yeast to make the mash a complete nutritional meal.

Oats are one of the most popular grains to feed horses. They are higher in fiber than corn and barley. Processing these grains will improve digestibility.

Foods that horses should never have is persimmons, bread, potatoes, pitted fruit, yogurt, or other dairy products.

## Water

Water is the most important nutrient for a horse, therefore it must be available at all times. Make sure it is clean and not frozen. Horses generally drink about two quarts of water for every pound of hay they consume. Water is crucial for their survival and health.

## Fresh Vegetables and Fruits

Vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins for horses. However, nothing should be given in excess as it can lead to very bad gas or colic problems.

Carrots are high in Vitamin A and celery is a good source of Vitamin K.

Corn, lettuce, squash, sweet potatoes, snow peas, and turnips are also very good.

Raisins, grapes, bananas, strawberries, cantaloupe, melons, and pumpkins are good and safe for horses.

However, any kind of fruit that has a stone or pit, such as avocado, peaches, cherries, etc., or the seeds of an apple should be avoided, as they can be very dangerous.

## Salt Blocks and Electrolytes

Horses must have salt blocks because they lose a large amount of the essential minerals in their sweat. If it's not replenished, an electrolyte imbalance may develop, which can lead to low blood pressure or even neurological or cardiovascular problems. Electrolytes in paste form can be given when needed.

## Deworming

Worms can cause weight loss, poor coat, and colic. To protect the horse from worms, one should remove manure regularly, and do not overcrowd the space with too many horses. Check with the veterinarian to perform a fecal egg count test and advise you on which dewormer to use.

## Teeth

Horse's teeth grow continuously. Uneven teeth can lead to sharp points and edges that cause pain and difficulty in chewing. Teeth should be checked once or twice a year by your vet to be floated, which is a filing to make them smoother.

Dental problems, from painful points or rotting teeth, can cause great difficulty in chewing. Either food falls out of the mouth or can lead to choking, which is an esophageal blockage, colic, and even death.

## Hoof Care

Hooves should be trimmed every eight to sixteen weeks. Trimming is more frequent for working horses and horses experiencing health issues effecting hoof care. Horseshoes must be replaced at the same frequency. Depending on your horse's activity level, or problem, the horse may require shoes. However, this should not be rushed or miscalled, because the horse is happier when they can be their natural selves. A farrier and your vet should be able to recommend the best course of action to keep the horse's hooves strong and well-balanced.

## Grooming and Baths

Grooming is just as important to a horse as it is to ourselves. Because they are such emotional beings, they immediately feel better when they are given this kind of care. If flies are a problem, when grooming, rub their tails and manes with dryer sheets, as they work as a repellent to flies.

Most horses love a bath, but for those who are nervous, use a bucket of water in lieu of a hose. Use a washcloth and sponge at first. Bathing is a personal choice. It can be a few times a year, to monthly, to weekly, to never. Do not bathe a horse in cold weather. However, warm water is good for a horse that is in pain.

## Vaccinations

Vaccinations vary based on age, the amount the horse travels, and location. Therefore, it is best to consult with the veterinarian to get a general idea of what vaccines one should give to their horse.

## Alternative Care

1: **Acupuncture** – Acupuncture is wonderful for horses and has proven to help them considerably. There are not many equine vets that do this procedure. However, there are acupuncture blankets, though not as good, that does help.

2: **Shiatsu** – Shiatsu has the same goal as acupuncture, but does not use needles. Various pressure is applied to the horse's body and has been proven to restore the horse's energy balance.

3: **Reiki** – Reiki is a Japanese spiritual healing technique in which practitioners can help the body heal itself through touch. “Rei” means life force and ‘ki’ means the physical energy of the body, so put together it means “life force to the body’. When giving Reiki (life force), the body receiving the Reiki starts to work on its own healing magic.

4: **Massage** – Massage is known to be a stress reliever for both horses and humans alike. When a horse is stressed, it will naturally carry tension to its muscles. A massage will help release this tension and encourages the horse to relax.

Follow the lines of the coat, starting at the withers, and use deep strokes to encourage drainage. Use a gliding movement with your fingers, palm, and hand, and in full contact with the body. Use even pressure, but take care of bony areas, such as the shoulder and point of the hip.

One easy way to release the horse's tension from pain is to put your thumb on the horse and then use the rest of your hand and move in a backward motion.

5: **Supplements** – horses need vitamins A, B, C, D, E, and K for optimal health. The quantities needed are small, but the effects are important. For some vitamins, too much in the horse's diet is just as bad as too little. Liquid Amino Acids can help support hoof care.

6: **Apple Cider Vinegar** – Apple cider vinegar works to acidify the horse's stomach for better digestion, cleansing the digestive tract. It can also aid in the absorption of minerals and helps balance the acid/alkaline ratio, which is essential for good health.

7: **Herbal Medicines** – the nine most popular herbal medicines for a horse are Ginseng, Ginkgo, Elderberry, Flax Seeds, Turmeric, Ginger, Valerian, and Chamomile.

# Horse Handling Safety Rules

## Shoes:

- Wear sturdy hard-toed shoes or boots that will protect your feet if the horse steps on them.

## Approaching:

- Get the horse's attention before approaching or touching.
- Let the horse know where you are.
- Always approach the horse from the front.
- Be calm and quiet. Sudden moves or loud noises can cause a horse to jump sideways, kick out or bolt.

## Standing:

- The safest place to stand beside your horse is at the shoulder where you can see each other.
- Never stand directly behind a horse. If you are grooming its tail, stand to one side and pull the tail gently towards you.
- If walking behind horse, either walk body to body very close with your hand constantly on hindquarters, or at least 15 feet away. A kick is most forceful at 3 feet away so avoid being at that distance around back of horse.
- When cleaning a horse's hooves or putting on leg bandages, don't squat or kneel. Bend over so that if the horse moves you can get out of the way quickly.
- When grooming or doctoring, have a holder or tie horse up. Never leave a tied horse unattended.
- While mucking out a small shelter or stall, never bring a vehicle into the space.

## **Leading:**

- Never loop lead ropes or reins around your hands or any other body part. If your horse pulls away, you could be dragged.
- Don't tie yourself to a horse in any way.
- The safest way to lead a horse is with a halter and lead rope. Excess lead rope should be folded in a figure 8 pattern and held in hand farthest from the horse.
- Don't hook your fingers through the halter straps or rings.
- Do not allow lead rope to drag on the ground.
- Always lead horse on the left side with your body in line with shoulder.
- Do not pull down on the lead rope. A short, light, quick correctional tug is all that is needed to get attention or slow down
- When going through a doorway, make sure the door is wide open so the horse doesn't hit itself on it. This can startle the horse and result in you being trampled or dragged. If the door is narrow, go through first, make the horse wait, and then have it go through after you as you stand to the side.
- When multiple horses are being lead together, travel single file with 2 horse lengths in between.
- If horse pulls back, step with horse rather than pull against.
- If horse rears up, release the lead rope immediately!
- If horse will not move forward, try walking slightly to left or right.

## **Trailer:**

- Pre-check truck and trailer before loading horse
- Loading a horse takes as much time as the horse needs to comfortably walk in.
- Lead horse up to ramp calmly, with slow constant pace. If horse stops, give a gentle tug and release, but do not pull hard on lead rope.

- In a stock trailer, it is much safer to let horse walk into trailer alone while you walk on outside just ahead, feeding the lead rope through the openings to where you will tie up.
- In closed trailer, open front door to show horse there is light and opening ahead. Walk in just ahead of horse and tie up quickly, then exit calmly.
- Always tie horse up with enough slack to comfortably move head from side to side.
- Check to make sure horse is safe and secure for travel before closing door and ramp.

### **Tying:**

- When tying, use a quick-release knot or panic snap so that if your horse gets scared and pulls backwards, it can quickly be freed. The feeling of being constrained can make a scared horse panic to the point of hurting itself or you.

### **Releasing:**

- Turn horse to face you, stand at horse's side and pat horse quietly before removing halter.
- When releasing multiple horse in a pasture, coordinate with other staff to release the horses at the same time to prevent panic or excitement in unreleased horses.

# Grooming in 8 Steps

## **Step 1: Use a Lead Rope to Secure Horse**

Before beginning to groom your horse, you must properly secure the horse using a quick release knot.

## **Step 2: Use the Curry Comb to Loosen Excess Dirt and Mud**

Begin using the rubber curry comb in small (about the size of your palm) circular motions to loosen excess dirt and mud. Start at the neck and work your way down each side of the horse. Avoid using the curry comb on the face, spine, and legs of your horse as these areas are sensitive.

Metal curry combs are available to gently remove the loose winter coat of hair in the Spring. They are harsh and can injure the horse, so be gentle.

## **Step 3: Use a Hard/stiff Brush to Remove Dirt and Mud**

Start at the neck of the horse and work your way towards the rear of the horse with the hard/stiff brush. Use short, brisk strokes to remove the excess dirt and mud that was loosened with the curry comb. Avoid using the hard brush on sensitive areas of the horse including the face, ears, and legs as this can cause discomfort and irritation to the horse.

## **Step 4: Use a Soft Brush to Remove Any Remaining Dust and to Groom Sensitive Areas**

Use the soft brush to remove the last layer of dust from your horse's body. Also, use this brush to groom sensitive areas such as the face and legs. Gently brush the face with a soft brush (smaller soft brushes can be purchased to aid in brushing the face). Next, brush the horse's entire body with this brush, beginning at the head and working back towards the rump on both sides of the horse.

### **Step 5: Use a Sponge or Washcloth to Clean Your Horse's Face**

Gently clean around your horse's eyes and nose with a wet/damp sponge or washcloth. A different sponge or washcloth can be used to clean around the dock area (around the tail) of the horse. It is important to note that if you will be grooming multiple horses, make sure you do clean and disinfect the sponge/washcloth before re-using.

### **Step 6: Use a Wide-tooth Comb or Mane and Tail Brush to Brush Out the Mane and Tail**

*Warning: When performing this step, DO NOT STAND DIRECTLY BEHIND the horse!*

Run your fingers through your horse's mane and tail to work through any large knots. Take a fist-full of the horse's mane in one hand and use the other to gently comb through it. When combing out the tail, stand to the side of the horse (NOT DIRECTLY BEHIND the horse) and try to keep a hand or arm touching the horse so that they know that you are there. Olive Oil spray can be used to aid in detangling a particularly knotted mane or tail.

### **Step 7: Use a Hoofpick to Clean Your Horse's Hooves**

Lift your horse's hoof. Most horses will lift their hooves after you run your hand down the back of their legs. If your horse does not lift it's hoof then you can GENTLY squeeze the tendon on the back of the lower leg.

Use the hoofpick to scrape from the heel of the hoof towards the toe to remove any rocks, dirt, mud, or other foreign objects from your horse's hoof. Be very careful to avoid scraping the frog of the hoof with the hoofpick.

### **Step 8: Use Fly Spray When Necessary to Protect Your Horse**

During the months of the year when flies are present, spraying your horse with fly spray (formulated for horses) at the end of your grooming session can help protect him or her from these pesky insects. Avoid spraying the horse in the face with fly spray.