

DAILY & CHECK VITAL SIGNS

The daily check is a systematic scan of the horse from head to tail.

When? Once a day at the morning feeding. **Why?** If an abnormality is spotted early, it will be easier to treat. If something raises suspicion, take the horse's Vital Signs.

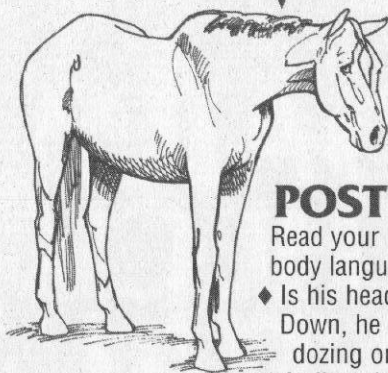
Important Note: Both the Daily Check and Vital Signs are much more meaningful if they are compared to a horse's normals. Readings taken when the horse is healthy should be recorded and used as baseline for future reference.



John Lyons

PERFECT HORSE™





POSTURE

Read your horse's body language.

- ◆ Is his head down or up? Down, he might just be dozing or he might be feeling sick.
- ◆ Is he holding one leg up? If it is a hind leg, he might be resting it while he is sleeping or it might be lame. If it is a front leg, it is probably lame.
- ◆ If he is not standing, how is he laying down? Is he in a normal, peaceful sleeping position? Or is he restless, rolling back and forth with anxiety?



EXPRESSION

What do his eyes and ears tell you?

Is he alert with ears forward and eyes bright?

If his head is down and his eyes are dull and he

does not look up when you approach, you should be very concerned.

- ◆ Do his eyes look peaceful and content or do they look tense and alarmed?

APPETITE

A good appetite is one of the signs of good health.

- ◆ Has your horse finished all of his feed from the previous feeding?
- ◆ Has he been drinking at least 5 gallons of water per day?
- ◆ Is he standing by his hay rack at feeding time waiting for his next meal?
- ◆ Does your horse finish all of his feed 2-3 hours after you feed him?

MANURE

What does his manure look like? It should be well formed yet the fecal balls should easily break in half.

- ◆ If the fecal balls are very dry and hard (and especially if you notice the horse strains when

defecating) he is not drinking enough water.

- ◆ Loose sloppy piles (more like “cow pies”) tell you that your horse’s feed is either too rich (too much grain, pasture or alfalfa hay), he is eating too much salt and water, he has an irritation in his digestive tract and has diarrhea, or he is very nervous.
- ◆ If you see slime or mucous on his manure, he has an irritated gut.
- ◆ If there is whole grain in the manure or long pieces of fiber from hay, it means the horse is either gobbling his feed without chewing, that the feed is passing through his body too fast, or that he has a dental problem and can’t chew his feed thoroughly.
- ◆ If you see worms in his manure, it is way past time for you to deworm him.

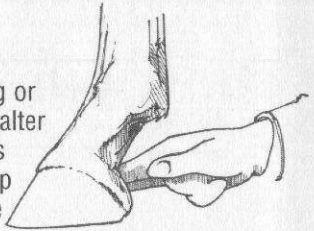
LIVING QUARTERS

Look at his stall or pen and his body for signs of distress: rubbing, rolling, or pawing.

- ◆ Is his tail ruffled?
- ◆ Is he covered with dirt or manure?
- ◆ Is he sweaty or has he sweated and dried?
- ◆ Are there new holes in his stall from pawing?
- ◆ If you have reason to suspect there might be a problem such as colic, you should immediately check his vital signs.

LIMBS

Look for wounds, swelling or puffiness. If warranted, halter the horse and examine his legs by palpation. Develop a “feel” for normal texture and temperature of a



horse’s legs. When the horse moves, does he place weight on all four legs equally or does he limp, bob his head, skip, or buckle over at the hoof or take short, stiff steps? These signs can indicate a lameness problem and you need to consult with your veterinarian.

SUGGESTED HOOF EXAMINATION ROUTINE

- ◆ Which leg is he resting?
- ◆ Are his front legs ahead of their normal (vertical) configuration? If so, it’s probably because it’s more comfortable for him to bear weight on his

heels but not his toes (associated with laminitis).

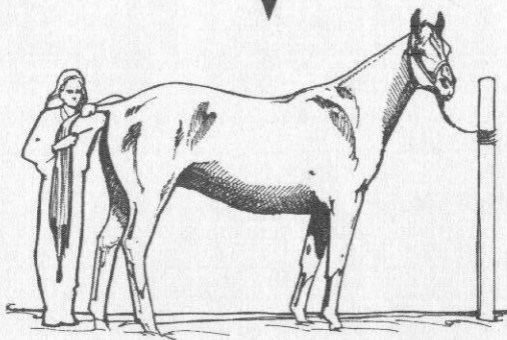
- ◆ If his front feet alternately point and shift weight, there might be pain in the heel region (associated with navicular syndrome).
- ◆ Are his hind legs positioned deep under his body? He might be trying to take weight off his front feet (associated with laminitis).
- ◆ Are his hind legs stretched out behind? This is often a sign of abdominal discomfort.
- ◆ Is he reluctant to walk to the examination area? If so, try to conduct the examination where he is.
- ◆ Wipe any mud or manure off the hoof wall and coronet.
- ◆ Pick out all of his hooves.
- ◆ Note any sensitivity in the clefts of frog (including the central cleft) when using a hoof pick to clean them.
- ◆ Look for imbedded rocks, splinters, nails, etc. in any part of the hoof, including the coronet.
- ◆ Test each branch of the shoe to see if it is loose.
- ◆ Sight down the bottom surface of the shoe to see if it is still flat. Sometimes the heel of a shoe will be stepped on and bent.
- ◆ Note if the shoe has slipped or twisted off to one side.
- ◆ Note if the shoe has slipped backward. (Be careful not to confuse this with a shoe that has purposely been set back by your farrier.
- ◆ Check the clinches to see they are tight or if they have opened up and started to pull through the hoof.
- ◆ Look for signs of injury on the coronary band, bulbs, or lower leg.

THE VITAL SIGNS

Vital signs give an indication of overall state of health. The results you obtain when you suspect a horse is ill will be much more useful if you compare them to the horse's own "normals." Approximate normal ranges are provided below.

TEMPERATURE

The average temperature of an adult horse at rest is about 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The normal range is about 99 to 101 degrees F but an increase in temperature, by itself, is not cause for alarm. Often a 2-degree increase is not a problem, but 4



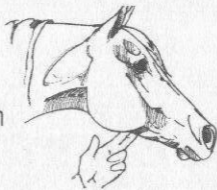
degrees above a horse's normal is cause for concern. Younger horses often have higher temperatures than mature horses in the same environment. Temperature might also increase when a horse is exercised, excited, in pain, diseased, or is in a hot, humid climate.

HOW TO TAKE A HORSE'S TEMPERATURE

The horse should be tied or held by an assistant. Use a 6-inch veterinary thermometer with a 2-foot string tied to it and an alligator clip or spring-type clothespin on the other end. Shake the thermometer until the mercury is at 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Lubricate the tip of the thermometer with room temperature petroleum jelly or a drop of saliva. Stand on the side of the horse, not directly behind him. Move the tail to the side by grasping the dock, not the tail hairs. Insert the thermometer gently into the rectum at an angle about 15 degrees above the horizontal. Attach the clip to the tail hairs so if the horse defecates, the thermometer won't fall to the ground and shatter. Remove the thermometer after two to three minutes and take the reading. Clean the thermometer before returning it to its case.

PULSE

The average pulse rate of an adult horse at rest is about 30 to 40 beats per minute.



AGE OF HORSE VERSUS PULSE RATE IN BEATS PER MINUTE

- Newborn foal: up to 120
- Two week old foal: up to 100
- Four week old foal: up to 70
- Yearling: 45-60
- Two Year Old: 40-50
- Adult: 30-40

NOTE: If a horse is excited, in pain, nervous, has a high temperature, is in shock, has a disease, or has just completed exercise, his pulse rate will be higher than normal.

HOW TO TAKE A HORSE'S PULSE:

Hold your index and middle finger over the artery (If you use your thumb, you risk getting your own reading confused with the horse's). Once you have located an artery, be sure you can feel the pulse clearly and then count the beats in one minute, or if the horse is not still, you can count for 15 seconds and multiply by 4. **Where?** Pulse rates can be taken anywhere an artery lies close to the surface of the skin. Just above the fetlock, use the palmar digital artery. Another pulse site is the mandibular artery on the inside of the horse's jawbone. You can also use a stethoscope and listen to the heart directly. Place the stethoscope at the horse's girth area just behind the point of his elbow. Count each lub-dub as one beat.

RESPIRATION

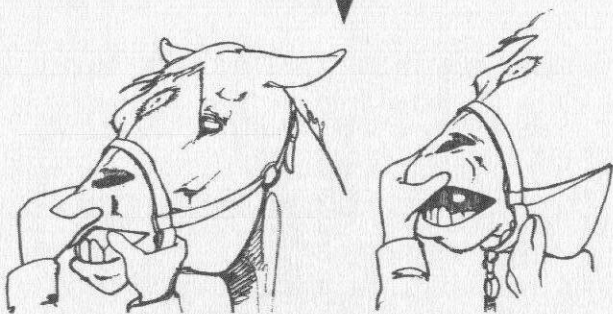
The average respiration rate of an adult horse at rest is 8 to 20 breaths per minute. One inspiration + one expiration = one breath. Respiration increases with hot, humid weather, exercise, fever, pain, pregnancy and age. The respiration rate should never exceed the pulse rate.

HOW TO MEASURE A HORSE'S RESPIRATION

Watch his rib area and for one minute count every time he breathes in and out as one breath. This will be easier to see after a horse has exercised than if he is resting. You will have to become practiced to get an accurate count when he is resting.

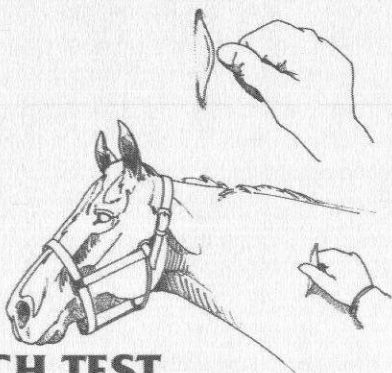
CAPILLARY REFILL TIME

Noting how long it takes for blood to return to blanched tissues is the CRT, a sign of general circulation. Normal is one to two seconds. If the CRT is prolonged, the horse is showing circulatory impairment and may be in shock. This is often indicative of a horse that has colic.



HOW TO MEASURE THE CRT

Exert light thumb pressure on the horse's gums for two seconds to cause the blood in the capillaries to be pushed out of the tissues, leaving a white spot the size and shape of your thumb print. Note how long it takes for normal color to return to the spot.



PINCH TEST

The pliability and resiliency of the skin is a good indication of the level of hydration. To determine if a horse is dehydrated, perform the pinch test.

HOW TO PERFORM THE PINCH TEST

Pick up a fold of skin in the shoulder or neck region and then release it. It should return to its flat position almost instantaneously, within a second or two. If the skin remains peaked for more than two seconds, this is termed a "standing tent" and indicates some degree of loss of body fluid. If the standing tent is 5 to 10 seconds or longer the horse is suffering from moderate to severe dehydration and needs immediate veterinary attention.

MUCOUS MEMBRANE COLOR

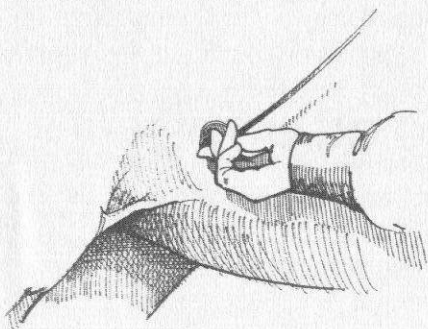
The color of the horse's gums, conjunctiva (lining of eyelids), and nostrils can provide information about a horse's overall condition and circulatory function.

COLOR OF MUCOUS MEMBRANES

- ◆ Glistening, pink gums indicate healthy, normal.
- ◆ Very pale or white gums indicate anemia or blood loss.
- ◆ Bright red gums indicate a toxic condition.
- ◆ Gray or blue gums indicate severe shock.
- ◆ Bright yellow gums are linked with liver problems.

LUNG SOUNDS

The lungs should sound clear. There should be no rattles, wheezes or gurgles.



HOW TO LISTEN TO THE LUNGS

Place your ear or a stethoscope against the horse's rib cage approximately in the area your leg would be if you were riding.

GUT SOUNDS

The abdomen usually produces sounds indicating roughage and fluids are moving in the intestines. Excess gut sounds are generally less indicative of a problem than the absence of sounds.

HOW TO LISTEN TO THE GUT SOUNDS

Put your ear or a stethoscope to your horse's flank. With practice, you should be able to determine if the gurgling, gaseous sounds are normal, in excess or absent.



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