

Daily Health Checks for Your Horse

Taking the time to check on your horse every day can be incredibly helpful in catching any signs of injury or illness early on. These daily health checks aren't just about physical health; they also involve observing your horse's behaviour to ensure they're feeling their best.

If you notice something that doesn't seem quite right during your check, don't hesitate to reach out to your vet. Catching issues early can make a significant difference in treatment outcomes.

Signs of a Healthy Horse



Before diving into daily checks, it's important to familiarise yourself with the signs of a healthy horse. Here are a few indicators to look out for:

- **Alertness:** Your horse should be aware of their surroundings and responsive.
- **Social Interaction:** Look for signs of interaction with their horse friends, whether they're nuzzling or just hanging out together.
- **Movement:** A healthy horse should be able to walk and trot freely, moving about comfortably.
- **Eyes:** Bright, clear eyes indicate good health.
- **Normal Vital Signs:** A typical temperature, pulse, and respiration rate (TPR) for a horse is essential.
- **Appetite:** A healthy appetite is a great sign.
- **Coat Condition:** A shiny, smooth coat reflects good health.
- **Body Condition:** Your horse should have a healthy body condition.

Taking Your Horse's Temperature, Pulse, and Respiration Rate (TPR)

Monitoring your horse's TPR is a vital part of their healthcare routine. Knowing what's normal for your horse will help you spot any changes that may indicate a problem.

What to Watch For: If your horse exhibits any of the following signs, it might be time to check their TPR:

- Faster-than-normal breathing
- Excessive sweating
- Changes in behaviour, like seeming depressed



Normal TPR for Horses:

- **Temperature:** Around 38°C (a slight variation is okay)
- **Pulse Rate:** 36 to 42 beats per minute
- **Respiration Rate:** 8 to 16 breaths per minute

You might notice that younger horses or foals, as well as older horses, may have slightly higher rates.

Important: If you find any abnormal readings and can't pinpoint a cause (like recent exercise or stress), make sure to consult your vet.

How to Take Your Horse's TPR

Temperature:

1. Use a digital thermometer to take your horse's temperature rectally.
2. Have someone hold your horse calmly while you work.
3. Stand to the side, behind the hindquarters, to stay safe.
4. Turn on the thermometer and check it's working.
5. Apply some petroleum jelly to the end of the thermometer for lubrication.
6. Gently lift your horse's tail and insert the thermometer at an angle, making sure it touches the inside wall.
7. Hold it in place for about 15 seconds or until it beeps.
8. Clean the thermometer thoroughly afterward.

Pulse Rate:

1. You can use a stethoscope or check the pulse yourself.
2. If using a stethoscope, place it just behind the left elbow.
3. If checking manually, find the facial artery just under the jawbone; you may need to apply light pressure.
4. Count the beats for 15 seconds, then multiply by four to get the pulse rate.

Respiration Rate:

1. Stand at the side of your horse and watch their ribcage.
2. Count one inhale and exhale as one breath.
3. Time how many breaths they take in 15 seconds, then multiply by four for breaths per minute.

Checking Your Horse's Daily Health



When it comes to daily health checks, you'll want to keep an eye on both their physical condition and behaviour. Here are some areas to focus on:

Skin and Coat: While grooming, look for any injuries or abnormalities. A healthy coat should be shiny and smooth. Dullness, patches of missing hair, or flaky skin might indicate issues like skin conditions or overall health problems.

Eyes: Bright, clear eyes without any discharge are a good sign. The skin around their eyes should be a pale pink. Watch out for any swelling or unusual discharge, as these can be signs of infections.

Nose: A healthy nose is clean and free of green or yellow discharge. Make sure it's soft, not cracked or overly dry, and check for steady breathing by observing the nostrils.

Legs and Feet: Many lameness issues start in the feet, so make sure to inspect them daily. Look for any foreign objects in the hooves, unusual colour patches, or unpleasant smells. Also, check the legs for any heat or swelling.

Appetite and Thirst: Your horse should have a healthy appetite. If they start quidding (dropping partially chewed food) or refuse to eat, it might signal dental issues. Keep an eye on their water intake too—healthy horses typically drink between 25 to 55 litres daily.

Droppings and Urine: Horses should pass droppings every few hours. The droppings should be firm and coated with mucus. Any extreme changes, like diarrhoea or hard stools, could indicate health problems. Similarly, monitor their urine—any dark colour or difficulty passing could be concerning.

Checking Your Horse's Behaviour



Behavioural changes can often indicate that something is off with your horse. From a distance, observe if they seem like their usual selves—alert and engaged with their surroundings. Here are some behaviours to watch for:

- Lack of interaction with you or other horses

- More or less lying down than usual
- Signs of lethargy or unusual pacing
- Changes in behaviour while riding, like head shaking

If you notice your horse holding their head low or pressing into a corner, with their ears pinned back, this could signal discomfort or illness. Any changes in behaviour should be noted, and it's best to consult your vet.

Other Routine Healthcare



In addition to daily checks, don't forget about other essential healthcare routines throughout the year:

- **Farrier Checks:** Generally every four to six weeks for shod horses or six to ten weeks for unshod.
- **Dental Checks:** Professional dental evaluations every six to twelve months.
- **Booster Vaccinations:** Annual boosters for equine flu and every two years for tetanus.
- **Worming:** Regular testing and targeted worming programs to keep your horse healthy.

By incorporating these daily checks and routines, you can help ensure your horse stays happy and healthy!