



# YOUR HORSE'S VITAL SIGNS

This summer is unusually hot all over. If you haven't already, now is the time to learn how to read your horse's vital signs. Following is a basic idea and general info, but we recommend you have a lesson from your vet in these very important techniques.

## 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. The normal temperature range for a horse is 99 to 101 degrees. If it's anymore than 105, then you should call your vet. Younger horses commonly 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 or humid climate. Clean the thermometer before returning it to its case.

## NOW 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. 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.

The average pulse rate of an adult horse at rest is about 30 to 40 beats per minute. Younger horses generally have a higher pulse rate:

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

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 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. 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.

*More health tips next time!*



# THE STORY OF KHEMO-GIRL

The well-bred bay Arabian mare was rescued from certain death in May 2000... her stablemate wasn't so lucky.

It all began with an anonymous tip to Animal Control. When their officers responded to the call, they were appalled by what they saw: one extremely emaciated horse down and unable to get back up, and another terribly skinny creature tied -- snubbed, actually -- to a stout post in the middle of a barren pasture. She had no food, no access to water, and no shelter. She had been there so long, unable to roll or self-groom in any way for so long, that she had developed a nasty skin condition and lost most of her hair. Her hooves were like elf shoes. The gelding was put to sleep on the spot by a veterinarian, and the bay mare was transported to Animal Control's shelter where she was immediately treated for dehydration and starvation. She had her teeth floated, her feet trimmed, and was given medicated baths daily.

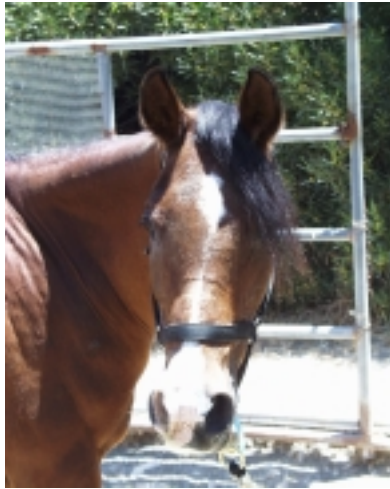
The stable she had been taken from was what is known in L.A. County as a "horse ghetto" -- these places are popular in areas where there are power towers; the land is otherwise useless, so ramshackle stables are set up and space-renters are expected to come out and care for their horses. Many do not. In this case, other horse owners turned a blind eye -- one woman even told a Humane Officer: "We take care of our horses; that's all we can do." Luckily, one person cared enough to call in the anonymous tip. Subsequent visits by Animal Control Officers turned up other cases of serious neglect (mostly goats and dogs).

The horses' owner never turned up. Rumors swirled: he disappeared because he feared prosecution; he was in jail; he was actually there, pretending to be a concerned onlooker when Animal Control showed up at the boarding stable. It looks like we'll never know for sure.



Early June 2000





Mid-July 2000

Once Animal Control had legal custody of the mare, they donated her to HorseAid. She was brought to our stable, and we cared for her daily (feed, supplements, medicated baths, walks on the trail, etc.) until she was ready to go to a permanent home. We called her “Khemo-Girl” because she looks so much like the famous Arabian stallion, Khemosabi, she just has to be a relative. Within two months, she gained over 100 pounds (on top of the 150/200 she gained while at Animal Control), grew most of her hair back, and became noticeably happier and more interested in life. It was a wonderful thing to be a part of... but, we were just a SafeHouse. She deserved a permanent home with a dedicated family -- and she found it with the Butcharts (who rechristened her “Abby”) in July. We couldn't be happier! (*Staci Wilson and Enzo Giobbe*)

## TRAINING TIP

Dear Staci,

I bought my pony a year ago from a riding school where he had been for 2 years. People who went to the riding school have told me that during the lessons he would do little more than trot and that the rider would sometimes be using 2 whips and another person chasing, also beating him with a whip.

I have tried to solve some of his problems by using a mouthing bit in order to get him to acknowledge that there is a bit in his mouth as it seemed that he had forgotten the point of a bit being there at all. I have asked the advice of many people and the reply has been schooling, schooling and more schooling including the use of spurs, schooling whip and change of bit.

Nothing seems to have made any difference no matter how much feed I give him, how gentle or hard I am with my heels, voice and whip, his mouth and sides seem to be senseless.

Please help me as I am getting desperate!!

Thank you

Karen Murdock

Dear Karen,

It sounds to me like the pony has been desensitized to cues. The best way for him to “relearn” sensitivity and awareness of what you are asking of him is through ground work.

Have you tried free longeing him? If you have a round pen or a large corral that you can modify a bit (rounding the corners off), I think you can get the ball rolling this way.

Rather than using a whip, twirl the end of your longe line to create energy behind him. If he turns to face you, twirl the rope at his head until he moves away, then lay off on the pressure once he is doing what you want him to do. A common mistake among people who longe horses is that they keep picking at the horse when he's moving along like he's supposed to. This really desensitizes the horse to cues. Keep him on his toes by changing direction, whoaing, and asking for gait changes at irregular intervals.

If at all possible, you should buy or rent the Pat Parelli video, Longeline Logic. It is the best presentation I have ever seen on this topic — he offers insights and advice no one else does. Another thing you could try is the Linda Tellington-Jones T-Touch method. This is sort of “equine massage” that gets the horse's body (and mouth) more sensitive. My book, *The Horse's Choice*, covers a method called “sacking out” which is also very effective. Even if your pony doesn't seem spooky, getting him to accept such things as having a rustling tarp strewn over his back, walking over the tarp, having an umbrella open over his head, party noisemakers going off nearby, will get him more interested in what is going on around him.

It sounds to me like the pony is nonresponsive because he was hit and kicked so much that he's become desensitized (be it mentally or physically) and just doesn't care what's happening to him.

As for the bit... I'm somewhat against bits, unless it's for a specific purpose (such as riding saddleseat with a double bridle). If you are only riding for pleasure, you should first try a nonleverage hackmore, such as a sidepull (also known as a “halfbreed”). It's basically a glorified halter. If you feel you need a little more leverage, then try a mechanical hackmore with a soft fuzzy over the nose. Eggbutt snaffles are good too, but first you must teach your pony yielding and flexing exercises (aka, stirrup kisses).

Good luck to you!

Staci Wilson

The Update is HorseAid's quarterly publication featuring timely equine related articles — international, national, state/province, and local legislation/parliamentary issues (including on-going abuse litigations and prosecutions), training tips, equine health and wellness items, current abuse alerts and issues, and much more. On occasion, we also feature horses and ponies that are a part of the HorseAid programme seeking a loving home. If it has anything to do with horses, we cover it.

Sorry, due to a lack of funding, we no longer publish any periodicals. This was our last issue of the "Update".



“...so that all horses and ponies may lead a full and productive life, free from pain and abuse.”

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