Teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Responsible Ownership

A general guide for the first time horse or pony owner

Contents

Introduction

Owning your first horse or pony is an exciting experience, but it also brings with it significant lifestyle changes and a considerable time and energy commitment, as they require daily care throughout the year. Before taking the plunge, new owners should understand the time, financial, and other responsibilities involved. Horses and ponies thrive on routine, and it is important to be able to provide this. You'll also need to supervise regular farrier visits and occasional visits by a vet, equine dental technician, and perhaps other health professionals, all of which will take up your time.

This handbook is intended as a basic guide to looking after a horse or pony. Where horses or equines are referred to, ponies are also inferenced.

Buying a horse or pony

Before purchasing, take time to consider what you intend to do with the horse or pony. What is your level of experience with horses? It is important that you and your horse are a good match. Just as horses come in a variety of shapes, sizes and personalities, so do riders. It is our responsibility to ensure we meet the horse's welfare needs by providing them with a role, ridden or otherwise, that suits their individual characteristics.

Further advice for buying your first horse/pony

1. Consult with professionals for guidance.
2. Have a clear vision of what you want to achieve (whether for leisure, competitive success at specific levels or disciplines, or potential for breeding).
3. Look for a horse with experience in the discipline(s) you plan to pursue.
4. Be honest about your current skill and avoid taking on a horse you are not prepared for.
5. Ensure the horse has a good temperament.
6. Engage an experienced vet to perform a pre-purchase examination.

Where to buy

Horses can be purchased either privately or at public auctions. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages

Private sales

Advantages

- You have opportunity to try the horse/pony multiple times.
- You do not have to make an immediate decision.
- A home trial may be possible.

Disadvantages

- The horse may behave differently in a new environment to how it does at home.
- You may need to travel long distances to view a variety of horses.
- As the buyer, it is your responsibility to pay for the pre-purchase vetting.

Be sure to view the horse more than once, and try out activities you plan to do, such as hacking out alone or jumping. Take time to consult your coach or an experienced advisor and be sure to arrange a pre-purchase veterinary examination (vetting) before making your decision.

Agree the following details with the seller

- Clear terms regarding any deposit, including the conditions under which it should be refunded;
- Clear arrangements for any trial period, including responsibilities for costs, insurance, and emergency veterinary care;
- A sales contract outlining the terms and conditions of the purchase, along with a signed receipt; and
- Ensure that public liability insurance cover is in place from the date of purchase.

Public auctions

Advantages

- You can evaluate and select from a wide range of animals;
- Horses are vetted before the auction and can be re-vetted immediately after purchase; and
- Stable vices such as weaving, box walking, or crib biting, must be disclosed. If these are not declared, and the vice is confirmed by a vet or expert chosen by the sales company, the horse can be returned within several days of the sale.

Disadvantages

- Choosing the right horse can be challenging;
- There is no trial period with the horse; and
- The horse may behave differently once it's in a new home.

Financial implications of equine ownership

The initial purchase price may be relatively low when compared to the ongoing costs of care, so it is crucial to consider the long-term expenses of owning a horse. These costs include, but are not limited to:

- Forage and concentrate feed;
- Veterinary fees (for vaccinations, parasite control, and treatment of illness or emergencies);
- Bedding (if stabled);
- Annual dental checks;
- Land maintenance (including fertiliser, weed control, fencing upkeep etc.);
- Rugs, tack, and other equipment;
- Transportation;
- Insurance (public liability, and veterinary coverage); and
- Facility, and machinery maintenance or livery charges.

Meeting legislative requirements of horse ownership

Equine Premises Registration Number (EPRN)

Anyone intending to keep equines must first apply to their Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Regional Veterinary Office (RVO) to register the premises for this purpose.

Contact details for the RVO's can be found here.

Premises, once approved to keep equines, are issued with a unique EPRN (herd number).

If there are other species on the premises (such as sheep or cattle), the EPRN will be the same as the flock / herd number). However, it is still necessary to notify the RVO of your intention to keep equines by submitting a completed EPRN application form. Once approved, the existing herd number will be activated for the equines.

Horse Passports and Microchips (Registration)

It is a legal requirement for horses to have a passport (identity document). The passport should be issued no later than 12 months from the horse's date of birth or before the equine leaves the premises where it was born, whichever is the earlier date. Passport applications for foals should be submitted to the Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) within six months of birth. You must be in possession of a valid identification document (equine passport) in respect of each equine in your care and be in a position to present each such document to an authorised officer without delay.

Never purchase a horse without a passport. It is an offence to keep an equine that is not properly identified. Furthermore, it is an offence to be in a possession of an equine passport if you are not the keeper of the associated equine. Be sure to check the passport matches the horse being purchased.

Additionally, since 1 July 2009, all equines in the EU identified with a passport must also be implanted with a microchip by a veterinary practitioner. The number of the microchip must be recorded on the passport document. However the microchip alone does not serve to identify an equine, it must be used alongside the passport.

Ensure all data recorded in the passport of horses in your care are accurate and up-to-date at all times and notify the appropriate PIO of any changes in status and/or identification details of each – e.g. food chain status, implantation of microchips, castration, owner details, etc. this includes notification of the administration of medicines prohibited for the food chain.

Obtaining an Equine Passport

Contact an appropriate approved PIO to obtain information about the proper procedures for identifying the equines in your care.

Equines not eligible to enter a studbook may only be issued with a passport by an approved PIO located within the State. Follow the link provided at the end of this section for a list of the PIOs approved to issue passports for equines not entering a studbook.

If the operator wishes to enter an equine in a studbook, the operator should contact the relevant breed society for that breed.

Passports may only be issued by breed societies that are:

A. Located in Ireland and are approved by DAFM to operate a breeding book for that breed; or

B. Located in another Member State and are approved by DAFM to extend the geographical territory of their breeding programme to Ireland for that breed. If this option is selected, then the operator must submit the passport to a relevant PIO in Ireland within 30 days of it being issued so that the equine can registered to the Irish central equine database as, breed societies from other Member States, do not have access to update the Irish Central Equine database.

You can contact animal.breedingreg@agriculture.gov.ie for further information on breed societies approved in Ireland and those that are approved to extend the geographical territory of their breeding programme to Ireland.

Breed societies located in the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland) are not approved to issue passports to equines located in Ireland or other Member States of the EU. All passport applications for equines within the State must include the EPRN of the applicant.

Organisations authorised by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to issue equine passports.

How to register a foal

0 Months ..... by 6 Months ..... by 12 Months

1 2 3 4

1. Contact approved PIO to secure DNA kit
2. Vet inserts microchip and completes marking chart
3. Complete passport application with approved PIO (in the State)
4. Receive passport / ID documentation

Late registration

Equines for which passports are issued later than 12 months from the equine's date of birth are considered "late registrations". In such cases, only a duplicate or replacement passport can be issued, permanently excluding the equine from the food chain.

How to know if an equine is identified

The passport establishes the identity of an equine. If you do not have a passport for the equine, it must be scanned for a microchip. If a microchip is found the keeper must contact the AIM Division in DAFM to establish if the equine's details are recorded on DAFM's central equine database.

If no microchip is detected, the equine must be implanted with a microchip (issued by an approved PIO) by a practising veterinarian, and a completed passport application must be submitted to an appropriate approved PIO.

Loss of a Passport

In certain circumstances, duplicate or replacement identification documents may be issued. If an equine passport is lost, and the identity can be confirmed through the microchip or DNA, a duplicate passport may be issued only by the PIO that issued the original passport (even if the issuing PIO is in another EU Member State). If the passport is lost and identity cannot be established, a replacement document must be issued by an appropriate approved PIO operating in the State where the equine currently resides. Issuing of a duplicate or replacement passport permanently excludes the equine from the food chain.

Transfer of Ownership

When the ownership of an equine changes, the person transferring ownership must provide the passport to the new owner at the time of transfer. Never purchase an equine without receiving its passport. Both parties involved in the transfer must keep a record of the transaction. The new owner must register the transfer of ownership with the PIO that issued the original passport if it was issued in Ireland, or with the PIO that lodged the passport in Ireland if it was issued elsewhere. It is a legal requirement for a new owner to update the ownership details on the passport within 30 days of purchase. Failure to do so is an offence.

Movement and Records

The passport must always accompany the equine it was issued for whenever the animal is moved. Ensure that every equine moving on to and off your establishment is accompanied by its passport. Equines being moved to slaughter in another Member State must travel either directly to the slaughterhouse or through an approved assembly centre, accompanied by an intra-EU animal health certificate (ITAHC) issued by DAFM. This includes equines being moved to the UK or France for slaughter. You must inform DAFM when requesting an ITAHC if animals are being moved for the purpose of slaughter,

You must keep a record of horses that move on to or off your establishment. These records must include the Universal Equine Life Number (UELN) of the horse, the name and address and the EPRN of the establishment from which or to which a horse has moved. These records must be available for inspection by a DAFM Official on request.

Four key elements of equine identification and responsible ownership

1. **Microchip** - implanted in neck ligament
2. **Passport / ID Document** - includes marking chart and detailed description verified by vet
3. **Annual Census and database updates** - including record of movements
4. **Up-to-date herd register** - requiring changes of ownerships and notification of deaths

Medicinal Treatments

If an equine in your care is currently eligible for inclusion in the food chain and requires medication, you must provide the associated passport to the treating veterinary practitioner before administering any treatment to ensure the document is updated. You must keep a record of all medicines administered to each individual horse and must be able to present these records to a DAFM Official on request.

Imports from other EU Member States

Equines imported from other EU Member States must have a passport, which complies with EU legislation. The passport must be submitted to an approved PIO in Ireland within 30 days of the equine's arrival into Ireland. Additionally, equines imported from other EU Member States must be accompanied by an ITAHC. Certain registered equines may travel from France on a DOCOMs certificate instead of an ITAHC.

More information on Imports from other EU Member States

Imports from outside the EU

An equine imported into Ireland from a non-EU country must have an EU-compliant passport and the relevant health certificate. If an imported equine already has a compliant passport, that document must be submitted to an appropriate Irish PIO within 30 days of import, where the animal details will be recorded. If a new passport is required, an application must be submitted to an approved PIO within 30 days of importing the equine.

Equine Census

The registered keeper of every premises where equines are kept on the annual census night must submit a completed census return. Keepers who do not return a completed census return are committing an offence. Not submitting the census, return may prevent a keeper from being able to register foals; export horses; sell horses, or qualify for payments under DAFM equine-related schemes.

Slaughter

Equines intended for slaughter for human consumption must have a passport that meets current legislative and veterinary requirements. Equines may not be slaughtered for human consumption if there is an indication on the passport or on the DAFM central database that the animal is unsuitable for the food chain.

Death of an Equine other than at a Slaughter Plant

If an equine's life is ended outside of an approved slaughter plant, the carcass must be processed at an approved knackery. Equine carcasses moving to knackeries must be accompanied by the associated equine passport. The associated equine passport must always be given to the knackery representative who will keep it until DAFM collects it.

Queries on Equine Passports

Contact the relevant approved Passport Issuing Organisation (PIO) or Animal Identification & Movement (AIM) Division in DAFM
www.equineid.ie
Email: horseid@agriculture.gov.ie
Telephone: 00353-(1)5058881

Caring for the welfare of the horse

To ensure that equines not only survive, but also thrive in their environment, the five domains model of animal welfare should be met. This model encompasses four physical aspects—nutrition, environment, health, and behaviour—which are all closely linked to the fifth domain, mental state.

A forage-based diet should be provided, with ample foraging opportunities in their environment. Additional concentrate feed should be given based on the individual horse's needs and body condition, with many requiring only a vitamin and mineral balancer alongside forage.

Horses are herd animals and should have social interaction with other equines. Daily turnout is important for both physical and mental well-being, as it helps reduce boredom, stress, and stereotypical behaviours.

The environment should be designed to minimise injury risks, while providing necessary shade and shelter. It should protect the horse from extreme weather conditions, such as freezing temperatures, heavy rain, and temperatures above 25°C.

It is essential to recognise signs of good and poor health, as well as pain, and to manage illness or discomfort with veterinary supervision. Implementing an annual health care plan can help prevent health issues.

Each horse should be managed as an individual, as their stabling and social needs may vary. The personalities of horses can be quite distinct—some may be aggressive, others shy, some greedy, others fussy, some nervous, and others calm. Recognising these individual characteristics is crucial for creating a routine and environment that supports their well-being. Spend time getting to know your new horse and begin building the foundation for a positive partnership.

Facilities for keeping the horse

Before purchasing a horse, make sure you have access to suitable facilities for their care. This includes land, stabling, a manure pit, soiled water tank(s), a feed and forage storage area, and space for tack and other yard equipment. If you don't have your own stable or land, you will need to arrange livery (renting stabling, turnout, and exercise facilities, with varying levels of care available, such as full, part, DIY (do it yourself), or grass livery).

You'll also need a safe area to exercise the horse. Keep in mind that in winter, it may be unsafe to ride on the road before or after school/work hours. Additionally, you'll need a way to transport the horse, especially in case of an emergency, such as transferring the horse to a veterinary clinic or hospital for treatment.

Stabling (Housing)

The stable must be safe for the horse or pony, free from hazards, and built to a high standard with proper maintenance. The recommended minimum size is 3.6m x 3.6m (12 x 12 ft) for a horse and 2.7m x 2.7m (9 x 9 ft) for a pony. The stable should offer enough space for the horse to move freely, stand, lie down, roll, and move their head and neck fully.

Ventilation and light

Good ventilation, providing six to eight air changes per hour, is essential for removing air pollutants and dust that can harm the horse's respiratory system. Natural airflow above the horse's head, through permanently open ventilation, is necessary. An outlet vent at the highest point of the roof allows stale air and contaminants to escape.

Natural light is beneficial for both horses and humans in the stable, helping to maintain a healthy environment. Lighting should be bright enough to inspect the horse properly and mimic daylight for extended periods during the day. Darkness is also necessary at night for the horse to rest fully.

Flooring and Bedding

The flooring should allow for proper drainage and connect to a tank to store runoff from soiled water. Bedding should be dry, dust-free, and provide the following benefits:

- It encourages the horse to lie down, reducing the risk of injury.
- It promotes urination and aids in the drainage and absorption of urine.
- It helps keep the horse clean.
- Hygienic bedding (free from irritants like dust, moulds, and mycotoxins) supports the horse's respiratory and skin health.

Remove soiled bedding daily to prevent build-up of ammonia, which can be harmful to the respiratory system. Unhygienic bedding combined with infrequent hoof inspection and cleaning can lead to poor hoof condition such as thrush.

For your safety, and to protect the horse’s respiratory system from irritation, always remove the horse from the stable when mucking out or replacing bedding.

Dispose of soiled bedding appropriately to a manure pit for composting, or export it off the farm.

Stable hygiene and quarantine

Stable hygiene is crucial for maintaining the health of your horses. Proper cleaning, including disinfection, can help reduce the risk of disease outbreaks including respiratory infections.

Implementing quarantine practices is also essential, particularly when horses from your yard travel off the property and come in contact with other equines, or in some cases when they are sick. This helps prevent the spread of disease. If using stables for quarantine, ensure there is a separate airspace in addition to to physical distance, as a barn environment is not ideal for this purpose due to the shared airspace. A designated paddock, without a shared water source and with no nose-to-nose contact between horses in adjacent paddocks, can also be used.

Emergency protocols

It is vital to have clear emergency protocols in place so everyone knows who to contact in the event of a yard emergency such as a fire or flood, to ensure the safety of the horses. Make sure to have serviced fire extinguishers and fire blankets readily available near the stables.

Land and Fencing

Stocking density

Each horse generally requires between 0.4 and 0.6 hectares (1-1.5 acres) of land. However, this is only a guide and can be influenced by several factors, including:

- The size and type of horse
- The horse's body condition
- The amount of time the horse spends stabled or at pasture
- The time of year
- The use of the land for forage conservation
- The type of soil and quality of grazing
- How the pasture is managed and maintained

Water Supply

A continuous supply of clean fresh water must be available at all times, with water containers large enough to meet the needs of all the horses present. Check the water supply daily. Position water troughs away from trees and areas with falling debris, and clean them regularly. Ensure troughs have no sharp edges and are not placed in field corners to prevent aggressive behaviour within the herd. Natural water sources should be fenced off.

Fencing

When selecting or assessing the suitability of fencing, consider factors such as durability, visibility, and maintenance needs. Security and safety should always be top priorities. Ensure that the boundaries are properly fenced and secure. Fence heights should be 1.08m - 1.38m for horses, 1m-1.3m for ponies, and 1.25m - 2m for stallions.

Post and rail fencing and/or horse-friendly electric fencing, or keepsafe fencing are good options, though some horses may not respect these as a sole form of fencing. A double fence line with an electric fence along the top of the field boundary offers added security. Never use barbed wire, as it can cause severe injuries, and plain wire, which can also lead to injury. Regularly check fencing and boundaries for loose nails, broken sections, loose wire and any other weaknesses.

Shelter

Shelter can be natural, such as trees and hedges (though keep in mind that deciduous plants and trees will not provide shelter in autumn or winter), or artificial field shelter structures.
Ensure that paddocks are free from poisonous plants and trees. Hedges that are poisonous to horses include privet, leylandi, box, and laurel while trees like sycamore, yew, laburnum, and oak are also potentially harmful to horses.

Pasture maintenance

Over-grazing, over-stocking and poor management can lead to 'horse sick' pasture. To maintain healthy pasture, practices like rotating paddocks (allowing them to rest intermittently) and cross grazing with other livestock are important practices. Other beneficial practices include applying fertilisers and lime (based on soil testing), aeration, weed control and drainage where needed.

Learn more about ventilation, stable hygiene, quarantine practices, water quality and more.

Feeding the horse

Correct feeding and maintenance of appropriate body condition is essential for the health of the horse.

Feeding requirements

Each horse has unique feeding needs depending based on several factors including:

- **Body condition**: Excess fat should be avoided, and bony structures should not be excessively visible or prominent.
- **Age, breed and temperament**: These characteristics influence the horse's dietary requirements.
- **Access to and quality of grazing**: A horse kept at pasture during winter, for example, may need additional concentrate feed to maintain body temperature and prevent weight loss. In spring and summer, grazing horses typically need less supplementary feed.
- **Time of year and weather conditions**: Horses may require extra feed for warmth during colder months.
- **Specific diet-related conditions**: Horses with conditions such as allergies to dust; laminitis, colic gastric ulcers, or equine metabolic syndrome require a carefully managed diet under veterinary supervision. If a horse shows behavioural problems, loses body condition, or becomes overweight, consult a vet.

Feeding Guidelines

Here are several key feeding guidelines to follow.

- **Always provide access to fresh, clean water**: Ensure water buckets, drinkers, or troughs are cleaned daily, especially in cold weather to ensure they are not inaccessible due to ice. Routine water quality testing is a good practice. Water is crucial for regulating the circulatory, lymphatic, digestive and excretory systems and in maintaining body temperature. The average water intake is around 36 litres per day, with higher needs in hot weather or during strenuous activity.

- **Provide plenty of good quality forage (hay/haylage) or access to grass**: This is essential in maintaining healthy gut function; ensure the horse is not without access to roughage (hay/haylage/grass) for longer than four hours.

- **Feed concentrates 'little and often', if required**: no more than 2kg of concentrates should be fed in a single feed.

- **Feed hygiene is important**: Offer good quality, hygienic feed stored in a clean, dry area. Mouldy feed, or forage, should not be fed.

- **Establish a consistent feeding routine**: Feed at the same times daily.

Feed based on temperament and body condition: Use body condition scoring to assess body condition. Weekly weighing using a weigh scale or weigh tape can help track weight changes. While feeding guidelines on feed bags are helpful, always monitor how the individual responds to the diet.

Feed by weight, not volume: Weigh both concentrate and forage portions (e.g. scoop, haynet or slice) to ensure accurate portions.

Use high quality feeds: Store them properly and conduct hygiene testing. It is important to test the nutrient content of forage and adjust concentrate feeding accordingly.

Make dietary changes gradually: If changing diet (including pasture), introduce new feed gradually over 10-14 days to reduce the risk of digestive upsets like colic.

Allow time before exercise: Do not exercise the horse immediately after feeding concentrates. Wait at least one hour before working and another before offering concentrates after exercise.

Maintain good hygiene: Keep the feed storage area clean, rodent-proof, and protected from wildlife and farm pets. Clean feeding equipment, feed utensils, feed bowls, and buckets daily. Do not mix the use of equipment for feeding for any other purposes on the yard.

Rugs when used, must be removed routinely to assess body condition, and check for any signs of rubbing or skin conditions.

Drinking and eating patterns

It is important to monitor horse's drinking and eating patterns. The 'pinch' test is a simple method for assessing dehydration. To perform it, pinch a fold of skin on the horse's neck between your thumb and index finger. When you release the skin it should quickly return to its normal position. If it takes longer than a few seconds (5 at most) this indicates dehydration.

Observe if the horse finishes its feed and how they eat. If feed is dropping from their mouth (quidding), it is a good idea to have their teeth examined. A horse that isn't eating up this could be showing signs of ill health and may require veterinary intervention.

Feeding tactics for a new horse

- Ask the previous owner about the horse's diet, including the brand, type, quantities of feed provided, as well as the reasons behind their choices. This information will help you make a gradual transition to a new feed. The previous owner might even be willing to supply some forage to assist with a gradual switch;
- Ensure you have forage and feed available for the horse when it arrives;
- Follow the basic feeding guidelines mentioned above;
- Feed according to maintenance or light work levels until you become familiar with the horse; and
- Keep the feeding programme simple. If in doubt reach out to one or more feed company helplines for advice.

Feed sources

Forage refers to high-fibre, low-starch feeds such as hay, haylage, grass, and chaff. It forms the foundation of any diet and is crucial for maintaining a healthy digestive system. Forage satisfies the horse's need to chew, which helps prevent stereotypical behaviours (i.e. crib biting). It also generates heat during digestion in the hindgut, assisting the horse in staying warm. Providing a consistent supply of forage also helps reduce the risk of colic.

The stomach constantly produces acid, and saliva helps neutralise this acid, lowering the chances of gastric ulcers developing. Chewing forage stimulates saliva production. Feeding forage before exercise also helps protect the stomach lining from the harmful effects of stomach acid.

Ad lib (continuous) forage, offered at ground level, is suitable when calorie intake does not need to be restricted. Using slow feeders or offering low-calorie, more fibrous forage (like second-cut forage) can help prevent long periods without chewing or eating.

For horses that are overweight, have equine metabolic syndrome (EMS), or are prone to laminitis, it is safer to choose forage with less than 10-12% sugar and starch content.

Concentrates – cereals are often high in starch, and feed companies produce cereal-based feeds with varying levels of energy and starch. Concentrates are typically necessary for horses engaged in medium to intense work, those needing to gain weight, or horses that have difficulty maintaining their weight.

Balancers – are a useful option for horses that don't need extra energy for work or body condition but still requires additional vitamins, minerals and protein to complement their forage.

Feed supplements – while these can help address nutritional deficiencies it is important to consult with a veterinarian before adding them to the diet. Over-supplementing can lead to health issues.

Steps to good feeding practice

1 **Estimate body condition.**
Determine if the horse needs to maintain, lose, or gain body condition.

2 **Estimate body weight.**
Use a weight tape or a weighbridge to estimate the horse's weight. To use a weighbridge, take the horse and transporter to the weighbridge and record the weight. Then make a return trip with the empty transporter and record the weight again. Subtract the second weight from the first to calculate the horse's weight.

3 **Estimate the appetite/feed intake.**
An adult working horse typically has an appetite/feed intake of about 2-2.5% of its bodyweight. Feed intake should not be less than 1.5% of bodyweight, including grazing, supplementary forage, and concentrate feeds. For horses at maintenance or in light to medium work, feed intake may range from 1.5 - 2%. These figures are guidelines only and should be adjusted based on the individual horse's needs.

Using a Formula: 2% Appetite (kg) = bodyweight/100 x 2
Example: Appetite of 500 kg horse = 500kg (bw) /100 x 2 = 10 kg dry matter /day

If a horse is overweight, reduce the feed intake percentage to to 1.5% and use slow feeders, small holed haynets, or swinging haynets to make the forage last longer. Do not feed below 1.5% of body weight without veterinary guidance.
If a horse is underweight the feed intake may be increased to 3% under veterinary supervision, and once any underlying health conditions have been ruled out. In such cases, higher-calorie forage, additional concentrates, and oil may be needed.

4 **Forage-to-concentrate ratio.**
Using Table 1, we can determine how to balance the diet between forage and concentrates.

Table 1: Forage - to – concentrate ratio

Maintenance	< 4 hours/week	20% Concentrate	80% Roughage
Light Work	4-6 hours/ week	30% Concentrate	70% Roughage
Medium Work	6-10 hours/ week	35% Concentrate	65% Roughage
Hard Work	10 hours + / week	40% Concentrate	60% Roughage

Different feeds have varying nutritional values. The nutrient content of forage should be analysed, as it can differ in both feed quality and hygiene between batches, and over the storage period. The energy and protein content of commercial feeds is typically listed on the bag.

The energy value of the feed needs to align with the horse's energy requirements, which can be more complicated to determine. First time owners should consider seeking advice from an experienced owner or a professional nutritionist.

General health care

A healthy horse has a shiny coat, finishes their feed, stays hydrated, shows interest in their surroundings, and shows no sign of injury or lameness, swelling or heat in the limbs or feet, coughing, or a runny nose. It is important to check horses daily for signs of health issues. Any unusual behavior should be noted and followed up with a vet. Keep an eye on muscle development or wastage. If there is a lack of expected muscle development, investigate further. Any significant change in performance may signal an improvement or decline in the horse's health and should be assessed.

If in doubt, always call the vet.

Guide for checking horse health

Look out for the following signs.

Behavioural changes: Is the horse behaving differently than usual? For instance, a normally active horse that suddenly becomes quiet could indicate a problem.

Eating issues: Quidding (dropping unchewed food) suggests dental problems. If the horse isn't eating concentrate feed, there may be an underlying problem. Also, monitor drinking habits.

Coat: A dull coat or lifeless coat is a reliable indicator of poor health.

Eyes: Bright alert eyes signal good health. Dull eyes or discharge from the eyes indicate poor health.

Respiration: Difficulty breathing, coughing, or a runny nose require attention.

Droppings: Note any changes in droppings (loose, reduced volume, presence of blood, etc.). Normal droppings should be round balls that break upon landing.

Temperature: Any noticeable increase or decrease in body temperature compared to normal requires attention.

Limbs: Gently run your hands over the limbs daily to check for any noticeable heat, swelling or injury. Signs of lameness such as shortened stride, reluctance to fully move a leg, a shuffling gait, resting or pointing a front limb, shifting of weight when standing, or an abnormal tail position should be addressed with your vet. A laminitic stance, where the legs are stretched forwards and weight is placed on the heels, also requires veterinary attention.

Consult your vet about any changes to normal behaviour or indications of ill health.

Checking Vital Signs

It is important to know the horse's normal temperature, pulse and respiration rates so you can compare readings if the horse seems unwell. Always measure the pulse and respiration readings first, before taking the temperature, as inserting a thermometer into the rectum can raise the horse's pulse and respiration rates.

Temperature

You will need a clinical thermometer, some Vaseline, and a piece of cotton wool. Securely tie the horse or have someone hold them. Remove the thermometer from its case and shake it to ensure the mercury is below the scale. Apply a small amount of Vaseline to the bulb of the thermometer. Approach the horse at the shoulder and move towards the hindquarters. Stand close to the side of the hindquarters and raise the tail. Gently insert the thermometer bulb into the rectum, ensuring it rests against the rectal wall. Avoid prodding the rectal wall with the thermometer or pushing it into any faeces. Hold the thermometer in place for about a minute, then remove, it wipe it clean, and read the temperature from the scale. Clean the thermometer with cold antiseptic solution, dry it, shake it, and return it to its case. The normal rectal temperature is 37.6–38.2°C (99–100.5°F). (Alternatively, you can use a digital thermometer.)

Pulse rate

To take the pulse, you will need to count seconds, such as with a stopwatch on your phone or using a watch with a second hand. Locate the facial artery, which is near the surface of the skin along the bottom of the jaw. Find the tubular vessel on the lower edge of the jaw using your fingertips. Apply gentle pressure until you feel the pulse. Count the number of beats in 15 seconds and multiply by four to calculate the pulse rate per minute. The normal resting rate is between 35 and 45 beats per minute, depending on the horse's size, age and fitness level.

Respiratory rate

Breathing is typically subtle and hard to notice when a horse is at rest. Stand back and observe the movement of the ribcage or the flanks. Count the number of breaths (in or out) over a 15-second period, then multiply by four to get the respiratory rate per minute. The normal respiratory rate is between 8 and 16 breaths per minute.

Capillary refill tests

The horse's gums should be pink and moist. Gently press on the gum above one of the top incisor teeth until it whitens. The colour should return immediately when you release your finger. If there is a delay in the colour returning, it may indicate reduced blood volume or blood pressure due to shock.

Riding health indicators

Many horses seem to move normally when led or lunged, yet exhibit signs of discomfort or lameness once ridden. This discomfort may always be present, only occurring under specific conditions, but it can still impact their performance and welfare. Identifying the cause of the pain often requires thorough diagnostic work, considering an evaluation of various factors: ridden exercise is a dynamic interaction between the horse, the rider, and the tack, with any of these – or a combination- potentially contributing to pain. Common causes of behaviours indicating pain, stress, or anxiety include lameness, poor saddle fit, and issues with rider size, position or balance.

The Ridden Horse Performance Checklist (also referred to as the Ridden Horse Pain Ethogram) consists of 24 behaviours, the majority of which are more than 10 times more likely to occur in a horse with musculoskeletal pain than in one without pain. A score of eight or higher on the checklist is often indicative of pain, though some horses with lameness may score below eight.

Read 'Development of an ethogram for a pain scoring system in ridden horses and its application to determine the presence of musculoskeletal pain'

The Ridden Horse Performance Checklist

- Repeated changes of head position (up/down) not in rhythm with the trot.
- Head tilted or tilting repeatedly.
- Head in front of the vertical (>30˚) for ≥10 seconds.
- Head behind vertical (>10˚) for ≥10seconds.
- Head position changes regularly, tossed or twisted from side to side.
- Ears rotated back behind vertical or flat (both or one only) for ≥5 seconds; repeatedly lay flat.
- Eye lids closed or half closed for 2–5 seconds; repeated rapid blinking.
- Sclera (white outer layer of the eyeball) exposed repeatedly.
- Intense stare (glazed expression, 'zoned out') for ≥5seconds
- Mouth opening ± shutting repeatedly with separation of teeth, for ≥10 seconds.
- Tongue exposed, protruding or hanging out, and/or moving in and out more than once.
- Bit pulled through the mouth on one side (left or right) repeatedly.
- Tail clamped tightly to middle or held to one side.
- Tail swishing large movements: repeatedly up and down/side to side/circular; during transitions.
- A rushed gait (frequency of trot steps > 40/15 seconds); irregular rhythm in trot or canter; repeated changes of speed in trot or canter.
- Gait too slow (frequency of trot steps <35/15seconds); passage-like trot

- Hindlimbs do not follow tracks of forelimbs but deviate to the left or the right; the movement is on three tracks in trot or canter as opposed to two.
- Repeated leg changes in canter: repeated strike off wrong leg; change of leg in front and /or behind (disunited).
- Reluctant to move forward (has to receive physical aid (leg squeeze) and/or verbal encouragement) or stops spontaneously.
- Bucking or kicking backwards (one or both hindlimbs).

Many horse owners and riders encounter challenges while riding, such as the horse bucking, napping toward a gate, or refusing to move. Similarly, when being tacked up, horses can exhibit behaviours like biting or kicking. It is important to remember that horses are not intentionally misbehaving. Their actions are a reflection of how they feel physically and emotionally. If your horse shows signs of pain or discomfort it is essential to contact your vet. Any diagnosis, treatment, or medication must be under veterinary supervision. Be sure to keep a record of all health related interventions.

Mental health

Horses can suffer from stress, and it is important not to overlook the impact social interactions with other horses can have on their well-being. A stressful environment like having a bullying horse stabled or sharing a field with them, or even being in a busy stable yard, can negatively affect a sensitive horse. Changes such as moving to a new yard, separating from an equine companion, or such a companion moving on, as well as competitions and unusual happenings in and around the yard can all have an impact on a horse's health – much like how stressful situations affect humans.

Vaccination

It is important to keep influenza and tetanus vaccinations up to date. If there is any concern antibody protection levels can be measured. Be sure to discuss with your vet.

Foot Care

Proper care of a horse's feet is essential, as they are complex and weight-bearing structures. Regular attention from a qualified farrier helps maintain their health and prevent issues. Always use qualified professional farrier services.

Farriers can provide the best advice on whether a horse needs shoes, considering factors such as the horse's workload, the type of work it does, its clinical history, the surface(s) it works on, hoof condition, and overall management.

Horses at grass and not in work

Horses with strong, healthy horn growth typically do not need shoes. Regular trimming every four to six weeks by a farrier will help prevent the hooves from becoming misshapen. If a horse has poor horn growth, or cracks and slits in the hooves, front shoes may be necessary.

Shoes on hind feet, however, can increase the risk of injury to other field companions.

Horses in work

Horses that are in regular work often require shoes for several reasons:

- To provide protection (especially when working on hard surfaces or hacking on roads).
- For better grip.
- To reduce concussion.
- To improve the condition of poor or neglected hooves.
- To correct conformational defects.

When should you call the farrier?

Your farrier can recommend an appropriate trimming or shoeing schedule, which may vary depending on the horse's needs. You should attend to the horse's feet in the following situations:

- Every four to six weeks on average.
- If a shoe is lost (cast) or loose (only a nail or two holding it on).
- If the clenches (the tops of the nails holding the show on the hoof wall) have risen, which could cause injury to the horse.
- If the shoe has worn thin.
- If the hooves have grown too long.
- If the shoe is too tight, causing a nail bind (where the nail is driven too close to the sensitive laminae, leading to lameness) or nail prick (where a nail punctures a sensitive part of the foot, also causing lameness).

Recognising a well-shod foot

A well-shod foot should have the following characteristics:

- The clenches are even and level,
- The foot has a regular, symmetrical,
- The horse is sound (not lame).

Daily foot care

Make it routine to pick out your horse's feet every day to maintain the health of the frog and monitor overall hoof condition. The frog plays a key role in the circulation within the leg, acting as a pump when it contacts the ground. It also helps prevent slipping and reduces concussion. If the frog becomes infected with thrush (a foul-smelling condition with moisture in the cleft, often caused by standing in dirty bedding and not regularly cleaning the feet), it can sometimes lead to lameness.

Picking out feet helps remove any stones that may have become lodged, preventing discomfort and reducing the risk of a stone bruise that could cause lameness. If a sharp stone damages the sole, infection can develop beneath it, and if left untreated, it can travel through the foot and emerge at the coronary band or at the heel. This will typically cause lameness, and the foot may need to be pared back to release the pus, and poulticed to draw out the infection. Early treatment is best to prevent infection from spreading. Regularly picking out the feet can help avoid this.

When picking out the feet, use the hoof pick from heel to toe, scraping away dirt and debris, and be careful around the sensitive frog. Always keep the point of the hoof pick facing away from your body. Pay attention to the deep channels on either side of the frog and, if the horse is shod, to the area at the heels under the ends of the shoe.

Teeth care

It is recommended to have dental checks at least once a year to ensure any issues are treated quickly. For older horses or those with specific abnormalities, this frequency may need to be increased.
Dental problems often develop subtly, and many horses may not show visible signs of discomfort until the issue has been ongoing for some time.

Signs of dental issues may include:

- Behavioural changes.
- Frequently dropping chewed forage or hard feed (quidding).
- Food pouching in the cheeks
- Unexplained weight loss
- Gum inflammation
- Resistance or evasion of the bit or bridle.
- Choking.
- Headshaking.
- Excessive salivation.
- Colic
- Refusing to eat
- Discharge from the mouth or nostrils.

- Noticeable grinding or chewing feed on the same side of their jaws every time.
- Facial swelling.
- Finding undigested food in the droppings.
- Or, in some cases, no noticeable signs at all – symptoms can be so subtle they go unnoticed.

Many horses with advanced dental problems show no obvious signs. Resistance to the bit in ridden horses or young horses being introduced to the bit should always be checked to rule out pain as the cause.

Benefits of regular dental checks include:

- Ensures efficient digestion and good eating habits.
- Early treatment is more effective (and usually cheaper) than managing advanced dental problems.
- Increases the likelihood of the horse remaining pain free.
- Helps prevent tooth loss and other dental problems in older horses.
- Reduces potential issues with biting.

Parasite control

All horses and ponies are affected by internal parasites, with the most important being small redworms, tapeworms in adult horses, and roundworms in foals. External parasites like lice can also be a concern. Parasites have life cycles that lead to regular re-infestation, with some parasites relying solely on the horse, while others, like bots and tapeworm, need a secondary host such as the bot fly and forage mite respectively.

Untreated high level parasite infestation can result in weight loss, decreased performance, anaemia, diarrhoea, a dull coat, a pot-bellied appearance, poor appetite, tail rubbing and in extreme cases even death if left untreated. An effective parasite control programme should not aim to completely eliminate a parasite, but to reduce the risk of disease, control egg shedding, ensure effective anthelmintics (worming medications) use whilst reducing the risk of the parasite population developing resistance to the anthelmintics. Once resistance to de-wormers develops on a property, it cannot be reversed.

Parasite control is a complex issue and should be discussed with your vet. A whole-herd approach for ALL equines on the property is crucial with foals and yearlings requiring special attention, as their management, testing, and treatment differs from adults. Effective parasite control involves two main strategies: proper grassland management; and the targeted use of anthelmintics, guided by regular testing.

Key steps to protect against parasites

Follow these five steps to help manage parasite control.

1. Assess
Target and treat based on risk. Conduct an initial risk assessment with your vet to develop a sustainable parasite control plan tailored to your farm's environment, system, and horses. The frequency of testing should be determined in collaboration with your vet and based on the herd's risk (see table 2 below).

2. Verify treatment effectiveness
Ensure that anthelmintics are working as intended. Test dung samples before and after treatment to confirm that the parasites have been effectively controlled by the wormer.

3. Graze with other farm animals (cattle or sheep)
If possible, graze horses alongside or in rotation with other farm animals. Horse parasites do not survive in these farm animals, which reduces the overall parasite load on pasture.

4. Remove dung around at-risk animals
Focus on areas with foals, young horses, or heavily grazed paddocks, ensuring dung is regularly cleared to reduce parasite exposure.

5. Isolate and test new or returning horses
Assess the risk posed by new arrivals or horses returning from grazing elsewhere. Separate them from other horses on the farm until they are tested and treated if necessary.

Assessing Risk

Assess risk in consultation with your vet. Table 2 outlines factors contributing to low, medium and high parasite burden risk; however, the farm should be evaluated as a whole, taking into account the interactions of all influencing factors.

Table 2: Assessing risk of parasitic burden

Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk
Repeated negative Faecal Worm Egg Count (FWEC*) and tapeworm antibody levels	Low/ moderate FWEC* and tapeworm antibody levels	High FWEC* and tapeworm antibody testing
Negative FWEC* and tapeworm antibody levels across a herd/ group	Low FWEC* and tapeworm antibody levels across a herd/ group	High FWEC*and tapeworm antibody levels across a herd/ group
Horses 5-15 years of age	Horses older than 15 years old	Horses younger than 5 years old
Droppings on pasture collected at least twice weekly	Irregular collection of droppings from pasture	No collection of droppings from pasture

**FWEC faecal worm egg count*

Table 2: Assessing risk of parasitic burden

Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk
Little or controlled movement of horses within the herd/ yard group	Occasional movement of horses within the herd/ yard group	Frequent movement of horses within the herd/ yard group
Low stocking density	Medium stocking density	High stocking density
Good pasture management	Moderate pasture management	Poor pasture management
No youngstock		Grazing with youngstock
Effective quarantine procedures for new arrivals	No quarantine procedure for new arrivals	No quarantine procedure for new arrivals
No history of parasite infection	History of worm infection	History of worm infection
No history of colic	History of colic	History of colic
No evidence of dewormer resistance	Dewormer resistance identified by FWEC reduction testing	Dewormer resistance identified on the yard by FWEC* reduction testing

**FWEC faecal worm egg count*

Grassland management

As horses graze, they may eat immature adult parasites that have attached themselves to the grass blades. The horse's own dung maintains the supply of worms for both itself and other horses grazing the same pasture.

Several strategies can help reduce faecal contamination and lower the likelihood of build of parasite populations on your pasture:

Rotate grazing areas: Move horses to different fields every month to ensure adequate grass cover. Electric fencing can be used to divide fields into smaller sections, allowing horses to graze areas with minimal larval contamination.

Prioritise access to clean grazing for younger horses: Young horses, particularly those under two years old, are more susceptible to certain parasites. Whenever possible, graze younger horses on clean, fresh, rested pastures.

Avoid overgrazing and overstocking: Ensure proper stocking rates (1-1.5 horses per hectare), to prevent horses to eating weeds, dirt, and parasites. Overgrazed fields are left with few plants, which are heavily contaminated with larvae.

Topping or tight grazing: Topping the pasture or grazing it closely exposes the base of the grass blades to sunlight, helping to kill off some parasites, more especially during prolonged hot weather.

Remove droppings: Manually picking up droppings or using a pasture vacuum cleaner is very beneficial in reducing parasite contamination, as you are removing the source of the parasite.

Mixed grazing with cattle or sheep: Grazing with cattle or sheep helps 'clean' the pastures, as their digestive systems do not support equine parasites. Additionally, mixed grazing optimises pasture use.

Stable sanitation

The stable can also be a source of parasite ingestion in young horses (foals mostly).

Spreading manure on pasture without composting simply transfers any parasites from the stable to the field. If there is any evidence of resistance to anthelmintics on the property, manure should be removed from the property and not spread on land used by horses. Additionally, manure pits should be located away from stabling areas to protect the health of horses.

Avoid feeding horses on the ground, as this is a primary source for parasite ingestion. Always provide clean water and remove any standing water. Horses that defecate in their water bowls or buckets require extra attention.

Handling the horse

Approaching the horse

- Always speak to the horse before approaching or touching them, as some horses may startle and kick out when surprised.
- Approach the horse quietly from the side. If the horse is facing away from you, call to them and encourage to turn towards you. Never approach the horse directly from behind.
- When touching the horse, begin by placing a hand on their shoulder or neck, using a gentle rubbing motion.
- Never tie the horse by the reins, as they may pull back and injure themselves. Always use a headcollar and rope instead.

Working around the horse

- Always wear boots or hard-toed shoes when working around a horse to protect your feet. Never wear runners, soft shoes or go barefoot.

- When working with the horse, tie them securely with a quick-release knot, or have someone hold the horse with a lead rope. Cross-tying (using two ropes, one either side of the head collar) is safer when possible, but ensure the ropes have panic snaps or are tied to a breakable material like baling twine.

- Work close to the horse. When near the shoulder, you'll be less likely to be struck with the full force of a foot, and if you stay close to the body when working near the haunches or passing behind the horse, you'll be safer from kicks.

- Always let the horse know what you're about to do. For example, when picking up their feet, face the tail, run your hand down the body starting at the neck or shoulder, and never grab the foot quickly, as this may startle the horse and cause it to kick. To lift the foot, touch the shoulder or hindquarters, then run your hand down the leg. When holding the front foot, place your arm around the back of the leg and the inside of the foot, so the leg will move away from you if it is put down suddenly.

- Always work around the horse from a position as close to the shoulder as possible.
- Never stand directly behind or in front of the horse. When working with their tail, stand off to the side near the point of the buttock, facing toward the rear. Grasp the tail and bring it around to you.
- Stay calm, confident, and composed around horses. Nervous handlers can cause anxiety in horses.
- Never tease the horse, as this can lead to dangerous habits. Avoid frequently feeding the horse treats from your hand.
- Maintain control of your temper at all times, but be firm.
- If leaving a headcollar on a loose horse, make sure it is a breakaway type. Leather headcollars, while more expensive, are preferable to nylon.
- Ensure the headcollar is not too loose, as the horse could get caught in it while scratching its head with a hind foot. A loose headcollar can also catch on fence posts or other objects in the pasture. Check the fit regularly, especially since some materials shrink when wet.
- For young horses, check the fit of their headcollar daily. As they grow, their head will too, and an ill-fitting headcollar can cause significant discomfort or pain.

Leading the horse

- When leading your horse, always walk beside them, not in front or behind. The safest position is at the shoulder. Never pull the horse behind you, as they may suddenly jump forward on top of you.
- Always turn the horse away from you and walk around them.
- If the horse rears up, release the hand closest to the headcollar to maintain your balance and keep your feet on the ground. Never try to pull the horse down.
- It is more usual to lead from the left (near side), holding the lead rope with your right hand, ensuring no rope is trailing loose.
- It can be useful to teach a horse to lead from both sides of the headcollar. A horse should be comfortable working from both sides.
- When leading, extend your right elbow slightly towards the horse. This helps protect you, as if the horse makes contact, its shoulder will hit your elbow first, moving you away from them.
- Since the horse is stronger than you, never attempt to out-pull them.
- Never wrap the lead rope or reins around your hand, wrist, or body or around your shoulders or neck.
- Do not wear jewellery around horses, as rings can cut into your fingers, and bracelets may become caught in reins or the lead rope. Dangling earrings are particularly hazardous.
- Always use caution when leading a horse through narrow spaces like doors. Ensure you have firm control and step through first. Move quickly and get to one side to avoid being crowded by the horse.

- Always run up the stirrup irons when dismounting or leading the horse.
- When turning a horse loose, use your judgment. Lead them fully through the gate or door, then turn the horse to face the direction from which you came before unclipping the lead rope or removing the headcollar or bridle. Avoid letting the horse bolt when released.
- Avoid using excessively long lead ropes, as they can become tangled. Be mindful of coils when using lunge ropes and avoid letting them get twisted.

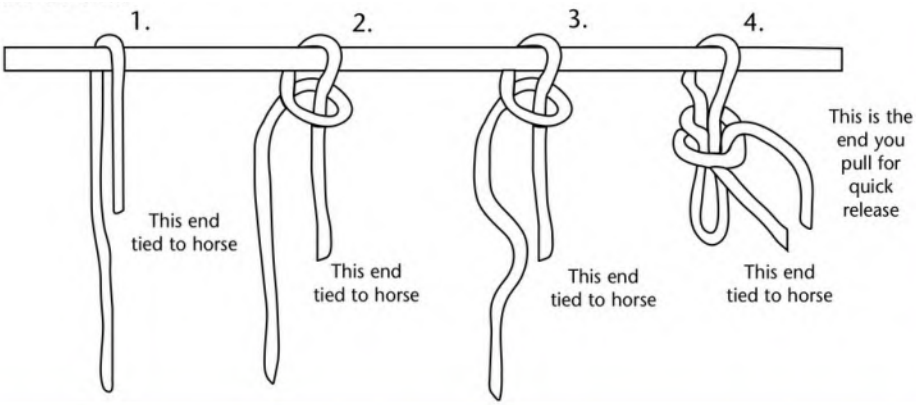
Tying the horse

- Always use a quick-release knot to tie a horse, as it allows for rapid release in case of emergency.
- Tie the horse at a safe distance from other unfamiliar horses to prevent potential fights.
- Use a rope that is long enough to allow the horse to move comfortably but short enough to avoid tangling or allowing the horse to get a foot over the rope.
- Never tie a horse by the reins, as they may pull back and risk injury. Always use a headcollar.
- Avoid tying a horse directly to fixed objects like gates, fences, metal rings, or trailers, as pulling back could cause panic and injury.
- Always tie the lead rope to a piece of string attached to the fixed object. The string will break under strain if the horse pulls back, reducing the risk of injury.

Tying the quick release knot

Practice Tying this knot without your horse until you can do it correctly and release it just by pulling on the free end. This is the **only** knot you should use to tie horses.

1. Put your lead rope over the post.
2. Bring the release end over and around the tie end.
3. Pull a loop through, using the release end, then pull the knot closed so it looks like picture 4.
4. Now, if your horse pulls back in a panic, you untie the knot by pulling on the release end - the knot will come undone easily.



Grooming the horse

Daily grooming of a ridden horse is essential for several reasons:

- Regular grooming supports good health by removing dust and dirt that can cause skin diseases and infections.
- It provides an opportunity for the handler to check for any injuries or wounds.
- Grooming helps build a stronger bond between the handler and the horse.

A basic grooming kit includes: a hoof pick, rubber curry comb, dandy brush, body brush, metal curry comb, mane comb, scissors, sweat scraper, and tail bandages.

The correct sequence for a full grooming session

- Begin by picking out the horse's feet to remove any stones or debris.
- Brush the body, starting from the shoulder or neck area and working back, ensuring the horse is properly tied or held.
- Groom the mane, using a mane comb, and gently tease out the tail with your fingers or a soft body brush. Avoid using a mane comb as it can break the hair, resulting in a thin tail.
- Clean the head using a body brush—never use a dandy brush, as its bristles are too harsh for the sensitive head. Be firm but gentle.
- Use separate sponges for cleaning the eyes, nostrils, and dock, and ensure they are color-coded to prevent cross-contamination.
- Finish by wiping down the coat with a cloth to remove any dust raised during grooming.

For horses or ponies living outside, do not give a full groom. Instead, pick out their feet, use a rubber curry comb in circular motions, and a dandy brush along the natural hair direction to remove mud. Avoid using a body brush as it strips the coat of natural oils, which provide warmth and act as a rain barrier. Make sure to remove mud and sweat marks from areas covered by tack before exercise to prevent sores caused by sweat and rubbing.

Safety While Grooming

- Never stand directly behind the horse. Always stay close to the horse and slightly to the side so that they can see you.
- Avoid sitting or kneeling next to the horse when grooming the lower areas. Instead, bend or squat.
- Never crawl under the horse to reach the other side.
- Do not leave grooming tools on the ground while working. Always place them in a safe spot where you won't trip, and where the horse won't step on them.

Transporting and loading

Transportation can be stressful for horses, both physically (temperature changes, fatigue) and emotionally (fear, anxiety). To ensure safe travel, horses must be in good health and fit for the journey. The vehicle used for transport should be clean, safe, well-ventilated, and regularly maintained and disinfected..

For long trips, plan ahead to allow for appropriate rest stops.

The horsebox or lorry

Regularly check the horsebox or lorry for the following:

- Inspect the couplings (horsebox) and brakes.
- Ensure there are no protruding objects.
- Check for rust or weakened door hinges.
- Verify that lights and indicators are working.
- Confirm that the tyres meet legal requirements and that tyre pressures are correct.
- Examine the floorboards for signs of rot or weakness, regularly lifting mats to check underneath.
- Make sure the towing hitch is at the correct height for the horsebox, and ensure the trailer tows level.

- Always make sure your horsebox (or lorry) is in good condition. At servicing, ask the mechanic to check the springs and wheel bearings. There should be sufficient available height to give the horse ample neck and head room.

Always ensure your horsebox (or lorry) is in good condition. When servicing, ask the mechanic to check the springs and wheel bearings. There should also be enough height for the horse to have sufficient neck and head room.

Driving

When driving, always observe the following:

- Secure all doors and the ramp.
- Double-check connections (lights, brakes, hitch, and safety chains).
- Drive carefully, making slow and steady turns, starts, and stops.
- Keep an eye on the road ahead to avoid potential emergencies.

Loading and unloading

- Use a loading bay for safety where this is available. Consider erecting a loading bay in your yard to increase the safety of this activity.
- Ensure the ground area around the ramp is safe before loading or unloading the horse.
- The ramp should be level and steady, not shifting when the horse steps on it.
- Use a headcollar and lead rope (at least five feet long) made of cotton. Avoid nylon ropes, as they can be hazardous if the horse pulls back. Ideally wear well-fitting gloves to protect your hands.
- Protect the horse's legs with bandages or travel boots that cover the coronary bands, hooves, heel area, knees, and hocks.
- Put a tail bandage on the horse to prevent rubbing.
- If loading is difficult, use a bridle for better control.
- Seek experienced help if you struggle with loading or unloading.
- Always stand to the side when opening or closing the ramp to avoid injury if the horse backs out quickly.
- Secure the rear chain or bar as soon as the horse is in the trailer and before tying it.
- Always tie the horse with a quick-release knot or use panic snaps.
- If travelling one horse in a two-horse trailer, load it on the driver's side to balance the weight. If travelling two, load the heavier horse on the driver's side.
- Use rubber mats for secure footing, and bedding (shavings or straw) to prevent splashing when the horse urinates.

- Some horses may experience motion sickness. Adjust the feeding schedule to avoid travelling immediately after feeding. Feed smaller portions more frequently if necessary.
- Be mindful of your feet and fingers when lowering the ramp, and always stand to the side.
- Never release the rear chain or bar before untangling the head tie, as the horse may back out as soon as the ramp is down.
- When backing the horse out of the trailer, do so carefully and slightly towards the center.
- If transporting two horses, have someone assist with the second horse's head while backing the first horse off the trailer to prevent the second from following.
- If a horse becomes difficult to handle when backing out, consider using the front ramp (with the same precautions).
- Walk the horse briefly after unloading to restore circulation before stabling, especially after long trips.
- When parking the trailer, always place blocks behind the wheels for added security.
- Never load a horse into an unhitched trailer.

In Summary

Proper horse care is essential for maintaining the health, safety, and well-being of your equine companion. By staying attentive to their physical and mental needs, can ensure a happy and healthy life for your horse. Always consult with professionals, such as your vet and experienced handlers, to develop the best care routine. With patience, consistency, and knowledge, you can build a strong bond with your horse and provide them with a fulfilling and healthy life.

Learn more about ventilation, stable hygiene, quarantine practices, water quality and more.

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