

# First-aid fundamentals



Being able to assess your horse's health is probably one of the most useful skills you can learn as a horse owner. With a little knowledge, you'll be prepared for anything

It's not something you can put your finger on, but your horse just isn't quite right. Do you call your vet? Do you wait a while to see how he is? It can be a dilemma. We always want to do the best for our horses, but an unnecessary vet bill is something we can all do without.

We went to an EquineSkills first-aid workshop with XL Equine to learn how to carry out a basic examination on a horse and establish whether he needs veterinary attention – essential skills for every horse owner!

## Look for changes

Every time you visit your horse, before you approach him take a minute to observe him from a distance. Watch what he's doing and how he's standing, for example, and get to know his normal behaviour. A change in behaviour is often the first sign that something's not right, so watching him for a while each day will help you get to know what's normal for him and alert you to any potential problems.

Get to know what's normal for your horse so you can spot any changes as soon as they occur

### KEY THINGS TO LOOK FOR INCLUDE...

- is he eating?
- is he bright or depressed?
- is he drinking enough?
- is he passing droppings and are they normal?

### Top tip

➤ If you're monitoring your horse's water intake and he has automatic waterers, turn them off and provide buckets so you can see how much he's drinking.

### For more information

For more information on XL Equine's EquineSkills courses, or to book a course to learn more about the techniques discussed in this feature, visit [xlequine.co.uk](http://xlequine.co.uk)

## Taking his TPR

If you think your horse might be unwell, perform TPR. This is a standard examination for any sick horse and it stands for...

- **TEMPERATURE**
- **PULSE**
- **RESPIRATION**

Get an idea of your horse's normal TPR values when he is well, as each horse will differ slightly, and it's sensible to keep a record of these. Then you'll know whether there are any relevant changes in the values when he's under the weather. For accurate results, remember to take your horse's TPR when he is resting.

## For accurate results, take your horse's TPR when he is resting



The transfacial artery sits behind the eye



### TEMPERATURE

#### Normal range

A horse's normal temperature ranges from 37.5°C to 38.5°C (99.5°F to

100.5°F). A temperature over 38.5°C is abnormal. Generally, a low temperature isn't a concern unless there's a risk he could be hypothermic – for example, if your horse has been laying down in the wet for a long period of time. You're much more likely to find a high temperature.

#### How to check

When taking your horse's temperature, always be more careful if he is stressed. It is safest to stand to the side of your horse and lean around. Apply Vaseline to the bulb of the thermometer, move the tail out of the way, then pop the thermometer into his anus. Make sure it's fully in, then press it gently against the side for one minute if it's a glass thermometer or until it beeps if it's a digital one. If the reading isn't normal, try it again to make sure it's accurate.

If your horse is nervous, give him a rub on the bottom to start with and go really slowly. If you're standing right round to one side and you can't see what you're doing, guide the thermometer in with your finger.



Press the thermometer against the side of the anus



### PULSE

#### Normal range

The normal pulse rate for a horse is 20 to 40 beats per minute.

#### How to check

The easiest pulse to feel is the facial artery that runs under the jaw, as it is thick and easy to find. Place two or three fingers over it and press down to stop the blood supply. Then release the pressure gently until you feel the pulse rate – it's very slow, so you will need to wait a few seconds. Use a watch with a second hand or the stopwatch on your phone to time your minute, but in situations where you need to take the pulse quickly, count the beats for 15 seconds, then multiply the result by four to get the rate for a minute.

Another good place to take the pulse is the transfacial artery which sits behind the eye. Place two fingers on it and wait to feel the pulse before you begin counting.



### RESPIRATION

#### Normal range

The normal respiration rate for a horse is eight to 12 breaths per minute.

#### How to check

To count your horse's breaths, stand back and watch his sides move. However, horses breathe very slowly, so if they are moving around or eating, it can be difficult to see each breath. Sometimes it's easier to watch the nostrils move or hold your hand over the nostril to feel the breath on your hand.

#### Top tip

- As your horse breathes, it can be easier to see his sides move from behind, so if he is relaxed about having his temperature taken, count his respiration rate at the same time.