

Monitor his health through your grooming



SUE PALMER
Equine physiotherapist

www.thehorsephysio.co.uk

In days gone by, grooms strapped each horse in their care for up to an hour every day. Today, we often rush to fit riding in around work, family and social life, meaning grooming is cut short and generally has the singular aim of your horse being clean enough to ride. So this year, could you adjust your schedule to include at least one

thorough grooming session for your horse each week?

Begin with brushes, finish by using your hands and take at least an hour from start to finish. Listen to your horse by observing his reaction to your touch – if he finches, puts his ears back or swishes his tail it could indicate discomfort, so contact your local chartered physiotherapist (www.acpat.co.uk) for a visit. Feel for heat, swelling or sensitivity, always comparing left with right. Work slowly to cover every inch of your horse, including his face, chest and between his legs. Use your hands as a tool to get to know your horse's body.

It's only by knowing what's usual that you know what's unusual. Think of your time as an investment in your horse's health and



Make proper grooming a key part of his care this year

performance, as essential as riding lessons, farrier visits and dental checks.

● **Find out more with my Horse Massage for Horse Owners book or DVD, or one-to-one courses available from www.thehorsephysio.co.uk**

Make one change

With so much advice out there on what's best for your horse, we've cut to the chase by asking five equine health professionals about single the most important things you can do to protect his wellbeing. From teeth to toes, we've got all the info you need

Maintain your horse at a healthy weight



DR TERESA HOLLANDS
Equine nutritionist

bit.ly/1zWEzyw

If you knew that 80% of ponies and 25% of horses in the UK have a chronic, low grade, systemic inflammatory disease¹, if

you knew this disease increases their risk of skin, muscular and respiratory diseases, reduces reproductive function, puts them at increased risk of dying under anaesthetic and of suffering from laminitis², you'd want to do something about it, wouldn't you? But only 35% of us recognise this disease³. It affects people too; 30% of the world's population (2.1 billion people) has been diagnosed. If your horse was a human, the EU would consider him disabled.

By now you'll have worked out that this

chronic, low grade, systemic inflammatory disease is commonly known as being overweight. The good news is this condition is preventable, so if your horse is at risk because he's a good doer, is comfortably cuddly or laid-back, you can protect him by using this checklist:

- 1 Ensure he's eating enough bulk whilst controlling calories, so know the energy value of what he eats. Feeding hay (10kg = 80MJ of energy) rather than straw (10kg = 50MJ) means your horse is eating 30MJ of extra energy every day – the same as three scoops of a leisure mix (or 7,170 human calories).
- 2 Make sure his fat score across his body is three by checking him fortnightly. Learn how here: bit.ly/1Aw8gV0
- 3 Ride, lunge or lead for 30 minutes a day, six days a week, to increase his heart rate to 80bpm.
- 4 Turn him out wearing a muzzle rather than leaving him stabled.
- 5 Balance his diet with a vitamin and mineral supplement or balancer.

1 SALONE ET AL. 2009 RVC 2 CARTER ET AL. 2004 3 IRELAND ET AL. 2014



Regular weight taping and fat scoring will help you keep tabs on whether he's the right weight



Regular dental checks will allow your horse to move his jaw freely



MARTIN BROOKES
Equine dental technician

www.equinedentist.me.uk

Have his teeth regularly treated

In the wild, a horse's teeth wear down at the same rate as they replace themselves – around 4mm per year.

But the different diet of domesticated horses doesn't allow them to wear their teeth correctly, so my key piece of advice is for owners to arrange dental checks for their horses every six to 12 months.

An equine dental technician (EDT) will treat your horse by reducing any overgrowth on his incisors and cheek teeth (premolars and molars) to allow the jaw to move freely. This will improve his ability to process his food and reduce the risk of choke or colic.

The movement of the jaw is

also important when ridden with a bit. The jaw should be able to slide freely backwards (with contact applied) and forwards (when contact is released) as well as sideways (when asking for lateral movement and bend).

Signs of a dental problem can include quidding (dropping balls of food), a foul odour from the mouth or nasal passage, or evading pressure and the contact when ridden.

● **Check your EDT is registered in the UK and attends regular training. A list of veterinary-approved EDTs registered with the British Association of Equine Dental Technicians can be found at www.baedt.com**

Let him live as nature intended



COLIN MITCHELL
BVMS (S) CERTIFIED MRCVS
Veterinary surgeon

www.scottmitchellassociates.co.uk

The key thing I'd recommend to owners for a horse's long-term health and welfare is quite simple: as much turnout for grazing as possible. The domestication of horses has removed them from

their natural state, and free grazing

goes some way to redressing this imbalance.

Turnout provides exercise and can help with weight control. However, native horses in the wild would spend all day grazing rough hill land just to eat enough calories to maintain their bodyweight, so fertilised, improved grazing can lead to weight gain, meaning special care is required for these types.

A horse who's constantly eating fibre also produces large amounts of saliva, which buffers stomach acid, and the grinding action helps keep the teeth healthy, so a turned out horse is much less likely to suffer from gastric ulcers and dental problems.

Many horses suffer from respiratory problems, such as inflammatory airway disease and recurrent airway obstruction or RAO (formerly known as COPD). Turnout in fresh air is one of the most important ways to control these conditions.

There are, of course, situations where horses cannot be turned out, for example when recovering from surgery or injury, but otherwise the more turnout the better – especially as turnout also helps your horse to relax mentally.



Time in the field has many benefits, including the chance to just be a horse



A robust foot hygiene routine will protect hoof condition



BEN BENSON
Farrier

www.btbensofarrier.co.uk

Protect his feet with a clean environment

One of the biggest factors in hoof health is the environment your horse lives in, so my top tip is to make sure your stable management and foot care routines are up to scratch. Poor stable hygiene and lax foot care are the biggest contributors to thrushy frogs and crumbling feet.

If your horse is messy in the stable, trying different bedding can help. Drainage is also key, but if it can't be altered or is insufficient then layering an absorbent product underneath the bulk of his bedding will soak up the wet and stop it splattering on to feet, legs or rugs, as well as making mucking out easier!

Secondly, scrubbing out your horse's feet regularly will remove stuck-on mud, which can act as a sponge for bacteria. Once properly dry, painting a good quality hoof product such as Kevin Bacon or Silverfeet on to the frogs, soles and hoof walls will help to waterproof your horse's feet and stop droppings or mud sticking to them.

Hoof horn is modified skin and needs to be kept supple to minimise cracking. The best test for any hoof oil is to rub it into your own skin and see how it feels after 10 minutes. Too many products act as a barrier instead of a moisturiser and protector.