

Q&A

HORSECARE

OUR EXPERT PANEL



JANE VAN LENNEP
Jane runs an Arabian Horse stud in Suffolk and has written equestrian books, including *First Foal* and *First Steps*. She also owns feed company Simple Systems.

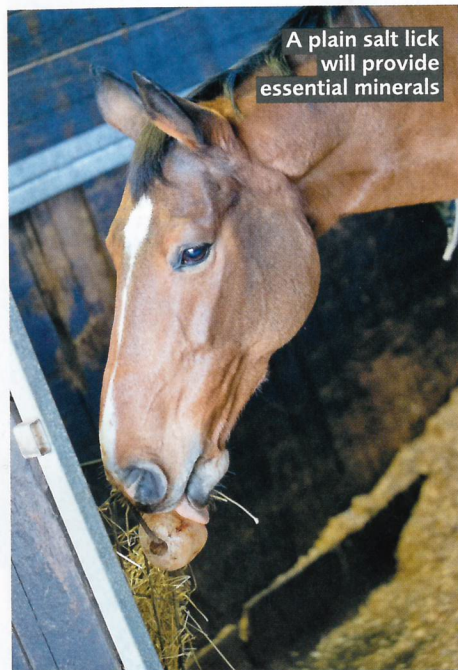


CAROLYN HENDERSON
Horse owner and journalist Carolyn has written a number of books on horse care, tack and showing. She is the author of the novel *Beside Me*.



IMOGEN BURROWS
Imogen graduated from the Royal Veterinary College in 2000. She works at Cliffe Equine in East Sussex. Her interests include internal medicine.

Help, he's eating poo!



A plain salt lick will provide essential minerals

Q My daughter's pony eats his own droppings. He is fed a good-quality, high-fibre diet and has ad-lib forage. He is stabled at night and lives out during the day. Why might he do this?

Heather Walters, by email

JANE SAYS There are many reasons why a horse or pony will eat droppings.

They might do so to increase fibre in the diet (by recycling it) or they may try to get extra vitamins from their droppings, due to a vitamin deficiency, such as vitamin B (gut microbes make B group vitamins and these can be reduced if your horse is stressed) and vitamin K.

Your pony may be lacking in minerals, so provide a plain salt lick and perhaps add a little pure seaweed to feeds for additional trace elements.

He could be eating the droppings as a source of probiotics (gut microbes). And if he has grain in his diet, it may not be properly digested so he could be having second dibs on the grain!

If the problem continues, talk to your vet.

Why does he lie down so much?

Q My new horse seems to spend a lot of time lying down. Is this normal?

Caroline Edwards, by email

IMOGEN SAYS Each individual horse will spend various amounts of time lying down.

Horses can sleep both standing up and lying down, but must lie down to obtain rapid eye movement (REM) sleep.

However, their time requirement of sleep is much less than ours – they only need two-and-a-half hours per 24-hour period. Horses have to lie down for one to two hours every few days to achieve their required REM sleep.

Of course, they may choose to sleep for longer than this, and much of the time spent lying down may not involve sleeping.

If the horse has previously suffered from locking stifles, and had surgery to correct this,

he may not be able to sleep standing up and may lie down more frequently.

Provided that your horse is eating and passing droppings normally and is performing well, I would put this sleeping behaviour down to an individual trait.

Horses need to lie down to obtain rapid eye movement sleep



I want to go bitless

Q I'm interested in trying my horse bitless, but there are lots of different bridles available. Where could I start?

Pat Thompson, Hinkley, Leics



There are many designs of bitless bridle on the market

CAROLYN SAYS We should all try riding bitless now and again in a safe, enclosed arena, to ensure we aren't relying on our hands rather than our leg and weight aids.

There are many bridle designs available, so going bitless can be confusing and costly.

The most basic way is to fit a drop noseband slightly higher than normal and attach reins to the side rings.

If you want a proper bitless bridle, work out which action your horse may best respond to.

The English hackamore is tried and tested; the German hackamore can be severe because of its long shanks and potential leverage – especially if used with a covered chain behind the jaw – and crossover designs like the Dr Cook's suits some, but not all, horses.

The Micklem Multibridle can be used as a lunge cavesson, bridle with bit or bitless.

The Orbitless bridle also offers lots of variety, as there are several fittings options.

Some companies will hire before you buy or give a money-back guarantee.

Visit: www.hireamicklembridle.co.uk or www.bitlessbridle.co.uk.



Fields should be big enough to feed and house all residents

Settling in a new horse

Q What's the best way to introduce a new horse to a herd? I am moving yards and my horse will have to go out in a big group in a large field. I'm worried he'll get injured as he's always bottom of the pecking order.

Name and address withheld

JANE SAYS Taking all of the horses' hind shoes off would be a good start, as metal-covered hooves can be deadly weapons.

Introduce your horse to one or a few of the others first, by riding together. Then, after your ride, turn them out together. He will be happier joining the herd if he already has some friends.

The field must be big enough to accommodate all the horses, with sufficient grazing so that no one goes hungry.

Fencing should be safe and the field should not have any narrow places or areas where he could get trapped in a corner.

What are these swellings?

Q My mare has what appears to be soft swellings in front of her udder – there are two bumps, one on each side. Can you tell me what they might be?

Shirley Hooper, by email

IMOGEN SAYS It is most likely these swellings are lymph nodes that are closely associated to the horse's udder.

However, it is possible that the udder in this mare is slightly larger, having an extra pair of mammary glands.

The female horse usually has four mammary glands – two on each side – which uniquely in this species drain through one teat canal. Hence, mares only have one teat on each side of the udder.



Mares have one teat on each side of their udder

Occasionally, a mare can have six glands – three on each side. This would result in a potentially larger size of udder, which would be soft to the touch.

Unless these areas become hard or painful, I would not be concerned. If you do have any worries, however, speak to your vet.

Eating more naturally

Q I want my horse to eat his hay from the floor in his stable.

However he gorges the whole lot much quicker than if I put it in a haynet. Are there any other methods of slowing down his eating time?

Bev Duncan, Edenbridge, Kent

TIP from the TOP

Bring a shine to bits and stirrup irons by cleaning them in the dishwasher. Rinse the bit in warm water afterwards to ensure all the soap is removed.

JANE SAYS Safely secure some boards across a corner of your horse's stable and put a tying-up ring behind them. That way, you can tie your haynet at a low level, safe behind the boards where he cannot get a hoof or a shoe caught in it.

Or, divide his hay ration into four piles and place one in each corner of the stable. This will encourage him to move about, thus



Eating from the floor is a more natural way for horses to feed

mimicking grazing, and it will take longer to eat than if it is all in one place.

Replacing 1kg of his hay with a 1kg compressed forage block will also slow down his eating time.

High-fibre, molasses-free forage cubes in a feeding ball are a great way of providing some entertainment value, as well as taking him longer to eat.