

Q&A

HORSECARE

OUR EXPERT PANEL



BECKY STROUD
Becky is a freelance groom who has worked with horses and run competition yards for over 10 years. She is also a qualified massage therapist.



MARK TABACHNIK
Vet Mark is an equine partner at Wright & Morten in Cheshire. He has a special interest in dentistry and is a qualified equine dental technician.



IMOGEN MERCER
As head girl for international event rider Sam Griffiths, Imogen has groomed at some of the world's top events, including Badminton and Burghley.

Should I clip his feathers off?

Q I want to show my cob at some indoor shows during winter. Is it fair to clip off his feathers for the show ring if he's going to be living out during the day? I worry he will get cold without the extra protection.

Emily Shaw, Uttoxeter, Staffs

IMOGEN SAYS If it is correct to clip off his feathers for the classes you intend to compete in, then doing so will give you the best chance in the ring.

However, without his feathers to protect him from the elements, your horse may be more prone to getting cold or developing mud fever.

You can help to keep his legs warm at night by applying correctly fitted stable bandages or wraps.

During his time in the field, use barrier creams to help prevent the onset of mud fever and dry



Clipped legs may need extra protection from the elements

his legs thoroughly when you bring him in each evening.

Horses are tougher than we think. As long as you keep an eye out for early signs of problems, I am sure he will be fine without his feathered legs this winter.

Arthritis concern

Q I have a 20-year-old cob who has been diagnosed with arthritis in his hocks. My vet said it's OK to ride the horse and even do some riding club activities, but I'm worried I'll be hurting him. What do you think?

Sheila Farr, Stone, Staffs



Light exercise can help older horses

MARK SAYS There are ways of managing arthritis. Vets commonly use corticosteroids injected directly into joints, which can provide powerful pain relief.

Long-term oral painkillers are also useful. They can be administered on an ad-hoc basis, perhaps before you ride him.

If the pain management is adequate, light regular exercise will keep him fitter and stop him from becoming stiff and losing muscle.

He will need a lot of warming up – at least 10 minutes of walking – and make sure the exercise level is appropriate for his condition.

Think about regular physiotherapy sessions too, as they are another useful way to keep him moving.

Tail care tips

Q My horse's tail is quite thick and tends to get tangled and muddy in winter. Can you offer any tips to make it easy to care for?

Margaret Jason, Cardiff

BECKY SAYS If your horse is only turned out for short periods, you could plait the tail to the bottom and secure the lower part to the dock with duct tape.

This will keep the tail tangle free, but you must undo the plait regularly or it could cause discomfort or increased hair breakage.

Alternatively, cover it in the leg of a pair of tights, or even use a tail bag – but be aware this could easily catch on fencing or a tree.

With a very muddy tail, it is kinder to wash it, rather than attempt to brush the dirt out.

Follow this with a detangling spray before using a wide-toothed comb, or your fingers, to work out any knots.



A conditioning spray can help detangle thick tails



A haynet can help keep a horse settled when travelling

He gets hot on the lorry

Q My horse loads fine but gets really hot and sweaty during transit, even in colder weather. Is there anything I can do to help him settle when travelling?

Tracy Stourhead, by email

IMOGEN SAYS There are a few things you can try. First, make sure the rugs he travels in aren't making him hot. A cooler rug that wicks away sweat, or no rug at all, will prevent him overheating.

If you have a webcam in the lorry or trailer you will be able to watch him during transit to see how he copes with his balance.

It could be that you need to set the partition wider or narrower to help him keep his footing.

It's also possible your horse isn't happy with the position he is travelling in. Horses can travel facing forwards or backwards, or herringbone (sideways). Try him in a lorry or trailer where he can stand in a different position, to see if that makes a difference.

Provide a haynet and stop for regular breaks on longer trips. You should also consider how you drive to ensure he has a smooth journey.

Failing all that, there are calmers which claim to keep horses more relaxed in stressful situations.

Is kissing spines hereditary?

Q My mare suffered from kissing spines and needed an operation. I'd like to breed from her, but was told the foal might have the same problem. Is this true?

Alison Walker, by email

MARK SAYS The science of genetics and heritability is complicated, therefore our knowledge of exactly what diseases and problems mares and stallions pass onto their offspring remains incomplete.

We know many diseases are caused by a number of factors, only one of which might be genetic.

Back conformation could be inherited, so long-backed mares may produce long-backed offspring, for example.

Also, the conformation of the actual vertebrae could be inherited.



Some conformation is inherited

However there is still a large leap from susceptible conformation to actual kissing spines disease.

At present the advice would be to go ahead and breed from your mare if she has good back conformation, but think twice if her conformation is poor.

Box rest concerns

Q My horse is on box rest for at least six weeks with a tendon injury. He isn't enjoying the experience and has already had colic twice. Are there any tips to avoid this happening again?

Name and address withheld

MARK SAYS You need to talk to your vet to try to work out what is causing the colic.

You say the horse is not enjoying the experience of being stabled. If he is stressed, then this could be causing it.

In which case, you need to come up with a solution that is less stressful for the horse, but still restricts his movement.

TIP from the TOP

To prevent mud fever and thrush, clean your horse's feet twice a day, and ensure he spends at least a few hours on dry ground so his feet can dry out.

Impaction colic can be caused by eating a straw bed



Turnout in a small paddock or hand grazing might be sensible compromises to make. They will help reduce stress while allowing the injury to heal at the same time.

Sedatives can be used judiciously, and there are many herbal-based products available to help keep horses calm.

The other common reason for horses colicking on box rest is impaction colic.

This occurs when horses become constipated due to a decreased intake of water, which leads to the food in the intestines becoming dry and getting stuck.

Horses eating straw beds will commonly suffer from this condition as straw is so dry and fibrous.

Ways to avoid this happening include using shavings, and feeding more fluids in the diet. Think about haylage rather than hay, and soak his hard feed.

Grass, if available at this time of year, is full of water and therefore a good lubricant.

Remember to make all diet changes gradually to avoid further bouts of colic.