

Ask the EXPERTS

Simple solutions for horse owners

GOT A PROBLEM? NEED AN ANSWER? WE'LL KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP...

Email your question to rebecca.statham@bauermedia.co.uk

Vet



IMOGEN BURROWS

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Stop the cough!

Q Now she's stabled, my mare's developed a cough and I often spot blobs of mucus-gunk on the floor. She doesn't get this in the field. Should I be worried?

Katy Johnson, Bedfordshire

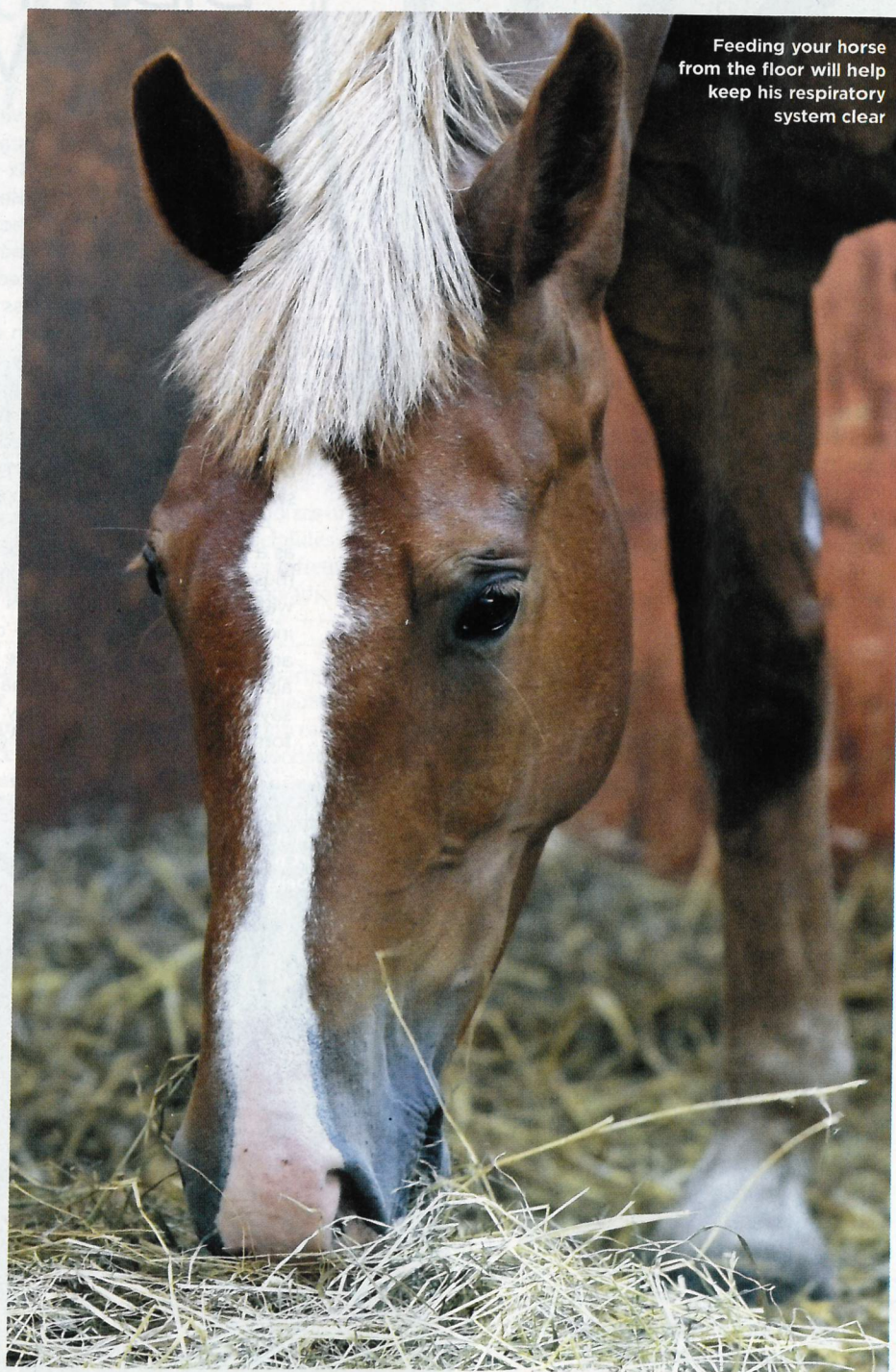
A This is a common problem when horses are stabled more frequently, as their environment tends not to be particularly well ventilated.

In a stable yard, the odours of faeces and urine tend to mix with the dust to stimulate an inflammatory response in the airways. Your horse's bodily response to this is to narrow the airways to reduce the amount of contaminants passing into the lungs, and increase the production of inflammatory cells to protect the respiratory system from these insults.

As a result, normal respiratory secretions thicken in an attempt to trap foreign particles and this, combined with the inflammatory cells, forms the white mucus often seen at the nostrils or on the floor!

Ideally, horses graze at ground level, which allows any respiratory secretions to drain from their lungs, through their airways and out through their nostrils. Feeding from the floor has other benefits, too, as the horse will lift his head to chew and swallow. Lifting his nostrils away from the food like this allows him to breathe fresh air.

When horses are stabled it's common to feed them using haynets, bars or mangers, but when they eat like this they rarely lift their nose from the forage. Eating in this way means that when they breathe there are high levels of pollens, fungal spores and moulds going into their airways.



Feeding your horse from the floor will help keep his respiratory system clear

Simple changes can be made to help reduce these problems. Try to:

- Allow your horse access to as much turnout as possible
- Feed from the floor where possible
- Ensure your horse has a good exercise routine to help keep his respiratory system healthy
- Provide access to a clean, clear environment during exercise
- Keep your horse's stable clean, cobweb and dust-free to improve his air quality
- Muck out and bed down when your horse is out to minimise the dust he inhales
- Use good quality forage, avoiding sources that smell or look mouldy and dusty