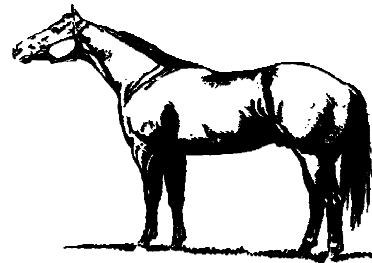


Animal Science Horse Information Series

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SIGNS OF A HEALTHY HORSE

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An unhealthy horse is expensive because of treatment costs and the loss of use.

The horse owner must become a good observer for signs of sickness. Some indications of a healthy horse include:

- **Body Condition Score. The horse should not be overweight (a common problem with horses) nor underweight. Horse owners can use Body Condition Score (BCS); a visual, hand-on method; to evaluate body fat content. The ribs should be adequately covering so you cannot see them, but they can be felt with slight pressure as the hand is run over the barrel of the horse. This horse would have a BCS of 5. When the ribs can't be felt, the horse has a BCS of 6 or higher. If the ribs can be seen the horse's BCS is a 4 or less. Fat horses have excess fat in the neck, over the croup, and around the tailhead with a BCS of 8 or 9.**

- **You can obtain a copy of “Body Condition Score in Horses” by contacting your county Extension office or the UT Department of Animal Science Web site: <http://animalscience.ag.utk.edu>, click on Extension, Horse Extension, Newsletters-Tennessee Horse Express.**
- **Attitude. The horse seems content and alert when resting. It is bright-eyed and perks-up readily when someone or something comes near. Notice the horse’s ears and eyes. A horse standing with head down, eyes glazed and drooped ears is sick.**
- **Appetite. A good appetite is indicated by the horse’s interest in feed. Failure to not consume all its feed within a reasonable time period is usually the first signs of a health problem.**
- **Hair coat. A slick, bright hair coat and pliable skin are characteristics of a healthy horse. A poor hair coat usually indicates a health problem; internal parasites will often cause a poor, rough hair coat.**
- **Good circulation. The gums and inside of the nostrils should be pink, indicating a normal, healthy horse with good blood circulation. When the gum is pressed with a finger, the pink color should return in 1 to 2 seconds. Rapid refill capacity occurs in healthy horses.**
- **T.P.R. Normal temperature (T), pulse (P), and respiration (R) indicates good health. The average rectal temperature of a mature horse is 100.5 F with a range of 99.0 to 100.8 F. The normal pulse rate is 33 to 44 beats per minute with a normal breathing rate of eight to 16 breaths per minute.**
- **Stance and movement. The way a horse stands and moves often indicates a problem.**

Pointing or placing one front foot forward of the other indicates an effort to reduce pressure on some part of the foot or leg. Unsoundness can usually be denoted as the horse walks or trots.

A good horseman is a good observer who knows when a horse is not feeling well.

Early diagnosis is a major step in preventing serious health problems.

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