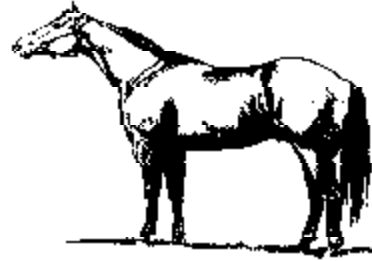


Extension Animal Science Horse Information Series



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RIDING UNCONDITIONED HORSES

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Have you reduced or quit exercising during the heat of summer? Your horse maybe stabled or on pasture with little, if any, riding due to the hot weather.

When you get ready to pleasure ride or show your horses again, can horses which were exercised in spring, be taken out of their stalls or pasture and ridden as if they had been used all summer?

Virginia Tech researched what happens when a horse's exercise is reduced.

They used 11 Arabians, six geldings and five mares that had been previously exercised. So these horses were physically conditioned at the start of this study.

Prior to this experiment, the horses had been conditioned on a high-speed treadmill for 12-weeks, then exercised to maintain condition for 30-weeks. They had been exercised on the treadmill for 20 minutes two days per week and walked for 30 minutes two other days per week

at a rate of 2.2 miles per hour.

Each horse was housed in a box stall and fed a ration that met or exceeded the nutritional needs for intense performance. The two rations were identical except for calcium content. One had 0.36 percent calcium, and the other had 0.62 percent calcium. Grass hay was chopped and combined with the other ration ingredients, along with a trace mineral mix.

Horses were fed 2 percent of their body weight so they would maintain their weight.

During this 12-week deconditioning study, they were walked at a rate of 2.2 miles per hour on a walker for 60 minutes seven days per week.

All horses were healthy during the study and didn't lose or gain any weight.

Bone mineral content (BMC or bone density) measured at three locations of the third metacarpal bone decreased rather linearly over the 12-week study.

The BMC decreased 0.45 percent per week. This reduction was likely due to a lack of mechanical stimuli on the bone, fewer and less forceful movements as were obtained during exercise.

BMC has been shown to be highly correlated to bone strength, breaking load and elasticity. BMC may influence resistance to skeletal injuries.

Feeding extra calcium to horses as they were being deconditioned did not influence their BMC. Feeding higher levels of calcium did not overcome the effects of lack of exercise.

The decrease in BMC may have been greater if the horses had not been walked daily.

These results indicate that it is not wise to take inactive horses on long or extensive rides or exercise. Horses which have been confined to stalls due to injuries or bad weather

should be reconditioned prior to exercise.

Conditioned horses on pasture exercising normally, probably do not experience as great a decrease in BMC. A study with yearlings showed that those on pasture had stronger bones than those stabled.

If you plan to only trail or pleasure ride, start with shorter rides, with horses that have been stabled and inactive for some time. Each ride can be a little longer as the horse improves its cardiovascular, muscular and bone strength.

You can probably ride horses that have been on pasture for longer distances initially. But be cautious until their cardiovascular, muscular and skeletal systems have improved.

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