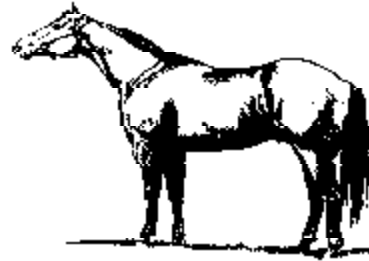


Extension Animal Science Horse Information Series

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WATER FOR HORSES

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Have you drank eight glasses of water, today?

It is important for you to get enough water, but do not forget about your horses.

Water is a nutrient, just like carbohydrates, fats, protein, vitamins and minerals.

But, it is often neglected because many individuals do not understand its importance.

Your horse can live longer without feed than it can without water. In fact, water is the major component of the horse's body.

The horse's body is 65-72 percent water on a fat-free basis. So, a 1,200-pound horse contains a whopping 98 gallons of water. That is why water is so important.

Water intake is related to what a horse eats. The horse needs about 1.5 quarts of water per pound of dry feed. If a 1,200-pound horse eats 18 pounds of feed, it needs about 6 gallons

of water.

Normally, horses drink 6-10 gallons of water daily. High intakes of protein or mineral result in horses drinking more water.

But, other factors, such as temperature, humidity, lactation and performance also influences water intake. When the temperature and humidity increase, horses drink more.

Lactating broodmares may drink 50-70 percent more water.

But, the most important factor is the level of performance. Horses in intense performance in hot weather may lose as much as 8 gallons of sweat daily. You should be concerned if your horse reduces the amount of water it normally drinks in hot weather, especially if it is in moderate or intense performance.

You can measure water loss by weight loss in horses. Horses can lose 5-10 percent of their body weight during strenuous competition.

This weight loss is mostly sweat, but urine and feces also contribute to water loss.

Foals need water in addition to what they receive from their dam's milk. Two-month-old foals will drink about 1.5 gallons of water daily.

Make sure your horse has an adequate supply of clean, fresh water at all times, especially in the hot summer, the height of the horse show season. At this time of year, check natural water supplies if your horse is on pasture. Water troughs or tanks used for outside horses should also be inspected and cleaned periodically and contain fresh, clean water at all times.

When it is hot and humid, stabled horses may need to be watered several times daily if

water is provided by bucket. Place two buckets in each stall if you can't water them at midday. Periodically wash these buckets thoroughly. Some horses have a habit of dropping feed in their water buckets.

If you use automatic waterers, check to be sure they are clean and functioning properly.

Horses that are hot and sweaty after being ridden should not be allowed to drink all the water they want. But, as you cool them out by walking, it is okay to allow them to have a few swallows of water. But, keep walking them until they are completely cooled-out.

Water quality is also important to your horses and may be more critical in hot weather. As natural water sources such as streams and ponds dry-up or become very low, water availability and quality can be a problem.

The National Research Council in 1989 advised limits of certain minerals in water for horses: arsenic, 0.2 mg/liter; copper, 0.5 mg/liter; fluoride, 2 mg/liter; lead 0.1 mg/liter and nitrate nitrogen, 100 mg/liter.

It has also been suggested that water contain less than 180 mg of calcium, 0.1 mg of iron, 0.5 mg of manganese and 0.1 mg of hydrogen sulfide per liter to prevent cleaning problems. Hard water could interfere with cleaning agents, which is important on breeding farms and training stables.

Water pH may also influence water intake. A pH of between 6.5 and 8.5 is considered normal. Below or above this range could cause taste variation in horses.

Horses may be sensitive to water contamination. One story related that two horses suddenly and dramatically reduced their water intake. When tested, the water supply had been

contaminated. The water source for these horses also supplied three families, who noted no difference in the taste or quality of the water. A water treatment system resulted in good, quality water again and a return to normal water intake by these horses.

If you have your own water system, test it annually. Test the pH, total dissolved solids, total coliform bacteria, fecal coliform bacteria, total plate count and noted minerals. Keep these records from year to year incase your water becomes contaminated. You can then prove that outside activities may have contaminated your water supply.

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