



The Best of Care

a guide to professional healthcare for your horse



Produced by the
British Equine Veterinary Association
in conjunction with
The Home of Rest for Horses and BEVA Trust



www.beva.org.uk

PURCHASING A HORSE OR PONY

Before you buy, think carefully about what type of horse or pony you are looking for. When you acquire a horse it becomes your responsibility 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, depending on you for its health, comfort and safety. There are four main points to consider when purchasing a horse or pony:

- What you are using it for.
- The facilities you have available.
- The amount of time you have to exercise and look after it.
- The cost of both buying and keeping it.

Take a knowledgeable friend with you when viewing prospective purchases. Not only will they be able to give you a second opinion on suitability, but they may also be able to spot any potential problems.

Pre-Purchase Veterinary Examination

When you've found your ideal horse or pony it is advisable to have a pre-purchase veterinary examination carried out (or vet's certificate as it is commonly known). The Five Stage Veterinary Examination for Purchase is carried out following guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) in conjunction with the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA). The examination should be carried out by an experienced veterinary surgeon who will report on whether it is advisable to go ahead with the purchase. Try to use your own veterinary surgeon, who will appreciate and advise on your requirements.

Having a horse examined prior to purchase is not cheap, but it may well save you money in the long run. If the horse passes the examination, then a certificate will be completed by the veterinary surgeon, which may be used for insuring the horse or pony when the sale is completed.



Vendor's certificate

A vendor's certificate is sometimes issued by the vendor or by the vendor's veterinary surgeon prior to selling the horse. It is not, nor should it be regarded as, a substitute for a pre-purchase veterinary examination.

HORSE PASSPORTS

Since 30th June 2004, all horses, ponies and donkeys in England are required to have a passport. They can be obtained from a large number of Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs) for a small fee. A full list of PIOs can be found on the DEFRA website. The passport will contain a section where the owner declares whether the animal is ultimately intended for human consumption. This is to ensure that certain veterinary medicines do not inadvertently end up in the human food chain. Vendors of horses are required to possess an up-to-date passport at the time the horse is offered for sale and a prospective purchaser should ask to view it before purchasing the horse.

SHOULD YOU INSURE YOUR HORSE?

Insurance

Even though it is perceived as being costly, insurance is essential in the long term to ensure that your horse receives the veterinary care it requires, as well as to cover the possible loss of the horse. Colic and orthopaedic surgery are inevitably expensive and you need cover for up to at least £5,000 for these important problems.

Insurance companies are becoming more flexible and there are now a wide variety of policies whatever your or your equine's requirements. The many types of cover available include:

- **Third party insurance**

This is essential, as personal injury claims can amount to large sums of money. If you are a member of an equestrian association, such as the British Horse Society, your membership may include public liability insurance.

- **All risks mortality**

This covers an animal if it is found dead or has to be destroyed on humane grounds, e.g. irreparably fractured leg.

- **Veterinary fees**

This covers the owner for non-routine treatment of their horse or pony following accident or illness. Current figures suggest that you should insure your horse or pony for up to £5,000 per incident.

- **Loss of use cover**

This provides a level of reimbursement if your horse or pony develops a permanent disability (e.g. navicular disease,

bone spavin). It is inevitably more expensive to insure for this.

MAINTAINING A HEALTHY HORSE

Worming

An all-year-round worming programme is essential for every horse and pony, whatever their age. You should follow a strategic worm control programme which recommends worming at the correct time interval with the most appropriate wormer. This, combined with good pasture management, will keep your horse or pony free from the diseases caused by internal parasites. Regular worming will reduce the risk of colic, diarrhoea and even death.

All horses that graze together should be wormed at the same time and droppings should be removed on a regular basis. Consult your veterinary surgeon for information on recommended worm control programmes.

The effectiveness of a worm control programme can be monitored by regularly submitting dropping samples from individual horses to your veterinary practice for worm egg counts.



Routine vaccination of your horse

It is important to have your horse routinely vaccinated by your veterinary surgeon against tetanus, equine influenza and ideally equine herpes virus. Veterinary advice should be sought on an effective vaccination programme.

- **Tetanus** is a disease that has an incubation period of between one and three weeks and is caused by bacteria entering the system through often unnoticed deep cuts and puncture wounds. The first signs of the disease include stiffness and reluctance to move. Tetanus can prove fatal and therefore vaccination is essential.

- **Equine influenza** (flu) is a contagious viral respiratory disease that debilitates the horse and leaves it susceptible to secondary infection. Symptoms include a clear discharge from the nostrils, along with a cough and a rise in temperature. The incubation period for equine influenza is only 1–5 days, with many horses remaining infectious for 3–6 days after the onset of clinical signs. Many equestrian organisations insist that horses hold current vaccination cards showing

continuous cover, and vaccination against influenza is now mandatory for all horses using racecourse premises.

- **Equine herpes virus** is another viral respiratory disease that can cause loss of form. Over 75% of horses are carriers of the virus and symptoms include fever, nasal discharge and coughing which can last for up to three weeks. Some types of the herpes virus can cause abortion in pregnant mares and paralysis of in-contact horses.

Hoof care

A registered farrier should trim or re-shoe horses and ponies every four to six weeks to maintain healthy hooves. Neglected feet may develop cracks and collapsed heels which may lead to lameness.

Veterinary surgeons often work in conjunction with farriers to correct the balance or shape of a horse's hoof as treatment for types of lameness.

For information on a local registered farrier, please contact the Farriers Registration Council or talk to your veterinary surgeon.



Dental care

Horses and ponies that have teeth with sharp and uneven edges often develop injuries in the mouth and have difficulty chewing as well as problems accepting the bit.

Routine dental care should be started in the first year of life with check-ups every year, or 6-monthly in horses aged 12+ or for those with malaligned jaws. During these check-ups, teeth should be examined and rasped by a veterinary surgeon or qualified dental technician and frequency of future dental checks discussed.



Saddle fitting

Saddlery should suit the needs and abilities of both horse and rider. It is highly recommended that a saddle is fitted to the shape of the horse or pony by a master saddler to ensure comfort, safety and effectiveness. Tack should be cleaned regularly to maintain it for safe use.



Nutrition

Good nutrition is essential in helping to maintain optimum health and well-being of your horse or pony. Feeding can also have an influence on the way your horse or pony behaves.

- **Allow access to fresh clean water at all times.** The amount of water your horse needs will depend on their diet, workload and sweating rate, as well as the environmental temperature. It is essential that clean water is always available. On average, the daily water requirement of a typical 500kg horse is 20–40 litres.

- **Feed at least half of the total diet as good quality long fibre.** Horses naturally graze and browse on fibre-containing feeds for approximately 16–18 hours per day. Feeding adequate fibre helps maintain healthy gut function and reduce abnormal behaviours.

TETANUS

Primary Vaccination

* Foals from 3 months of age from vaccinated mares

2 injections 4–6 weeks apart

Booster at intervals of 18–30 months

* Foals' vaccination start times depend on their ability to respond to vaccination as well as their dam's vaccination history

FLU & TETANUS

Vaccinate foals at 4 months of age

4–6 week interval for flu and tetanus

5–7 month interval for flu

Not more than a 365 day interval between vaccinations

Thereafter annual boosters giving flu or flu and tetanus in alternate years

Fibre can be found in forages such as grass, hay, haylage and high-fibre compound feeds. If possible, feed forage off a clean floor, as this is a more natural grazing position. If necessary, soak hay for around 30 minutes in clean water, to help reduce exposure of the lungs to dust and other particles.



- **Feed little and often.** Feed cereal-based compound feeds in at least two feeds a day for horses in light work and 3 to 4 times a day for horses in heavier work. Keep concentrate feeds to a maximum of 2.0–2.5kg for horses over 400kg and less for ponies.

Seek veterinary advice if a horse loses weight significantly or rapidly.

- **Feed by weight not volume.** It is important to weigh scoops of different feedstuffs as a guide to how much you are actually feeding.
- **Feed good quality feeds.** Never use feeds that are mouldy or past their best-before date, or that haven't been stored correctly.
- **Feed according to bodyweight.** As a guide, feed between 1.5–2.5% of bodyweight depending on the condition of the horse; this means around 10kg per day in total for a typical 500kg horse.

Each horse or pony is an individual and adjustments must be made for each horse.

- **All dietary changes should be made slowly** over at least two weeks. The horse has a delicate balance of gut microflora and this population needs time to adapt to the new diet. Do not feed items such as lawn clippings, large amounts of rapidly fermentable feeds such as apples, or feeds designed for other types of animals. Do not rapidly reduce feed intake, especially of overweight ponies or pregnant animals.
- **Keep to a routine** by feeding at the same times each day.
- **Allow at least 2 hours after feeding** before working your horse or pony and do not feed for at least an hour after heavy work.
- **If your horse or pony has a day off,** decrease feed from the evening before until the evening after the rest day.

For more information on feeding and nutrition, please see the BEVA website.

Forage

Hay/forage is safest fed on a swept floor as there is no risk of injury and the head is lowered to the normal grazing position.



Racks and nets all have the potential to cause injury.

If haynets are used they should be fixed at head height so that your horse or pony has less risk of getting its legs caught in the net.

Water supply

Between 50 and 70% of the horse's bodyweight consists of water. Stabled horses need more water because they are eating dry feed. Fresh water should be supplied in clean buckets or via automatic drinking bowls (provided a metering device is available and is cleaned twice a day). Buckets should be refilled at least twice a day and should be secured to prevent them from falling over. The average daily water requirement of a horse is 20–40 litres or 5–10 gallons.

STABLE MANAGEMENT

Stabling

Loose boxes are the most common form of stabling. Each horse must have room to lie down, stand up and be able to turn in comfort. The recommended minimum box size for horses is 3.66m x 3.66m (12ft x 12ft) and 3.05m x 3.05m (10ft x 10ft) for ponies. These are minimums and must take into consideration the size of the horse or pony.

Bedding

Bedding is essential to provide warmth, comfort and protection against cold weather and injury. It should be non-toxic and provide effective drainage to maintain a dry bed, and should consist of straw, wood shavings (or mixes), paper or chopped cardboard. Other less favoured alternatives

include peat and sawdust, but these options are not ideal.

Bedding must be dry and free of dust and mould, so ensure you have a good quality supplier.



Stable hygiene

Droppings and wet bedding should be removed at least twice a day. Loose hay and feed should be swept out of the stable and both the stable and yard should be kept clean and tidy.

Fire hazards

All electrical wires and light switches should be out of reach of both horses and rodents and be properly earthed. Piles of used bedding should be stored well away from the stable yard and smoking should not be allowed in the yard area.

All fire extinguishers and fire alarms should be checked regularly and fire exits should be kept clear.

HORSES AT GRASS

A field should be well fenced with a reliable water supply. Mature horses require a minimum of one to one and a half acres of

grass, as overcrowding may lead to competition for food, water and space. During the winter months, or very dry periods, supplementary feed will be required. Hay alone may not be sufficient, and if fed, must be supplied so as to avoid trampling into the mud. Horses should be checked twice daily and the grass availability and water supply should be monitored. During the spring and early autumn, keep an eye out for signs of laminitis, especially in ponies. Monitor bodyweight with a weighband. Provide restricted grazing for those animals prone to becoming overweight or who have had laminitis before.

Fencing and gateways

Fencing should ideally be post and rail and be high enough to prevent horses from escaping. Other alternatives include a single top rail with posts and tight plain wire fence strands underneath. Barbed wire fencing should be avoided as it causes injury. Also avoid sheep wire, as horses get caught in it. Use electric tape to keep horses away from barbed and sheep wire. Gateways should be securely fastened and padlocked if near a road.



Water supply

Horses should have access to a clean supply of water throughout the day, preferably from self-filling water troughs. Buckets and other watertight containers are also an option, although a lot of work. Water troughs and containers must be cleaned regularly to prevent the build-up of algae. Old bathtubs are not acceptable, as they are dangerous.



During the winter, water containers often ice up, so they must be checked frequently during cold weather to ensure that the horse can reach water.

Shelter

Shelter should be provided to shield horses from wind, rain and snow during the winter months and to provide shade and protection from flies during the summer months.

PASTURE MANAGEMENT

Field division

Ideally, your field should be divided up to allow sections to be rested while others are grazed, to avoid over-grazing.

Dung

Dung should be removed twice a week, all year round, to aid worm control.



Wet ground

If your field is very wet, stable or yard your horse to prevent mud fever (a bacterial skin infection). Symptoms of mud fever include inflamed skin and cracked heels. The legs and sometimes the belly are affected. Left untreated, legs may become permanently filled.



Weeds - including ragwort

Fields should be kept clear of weeds, particularly ragwort. Ragwort grows from June onwards and can grow to between 30–100cm high. The stems are woody and red near the base and the dark green stem leaves are irregular and ragged around the edge with dense yellow flowers. Ragwort is one of the most common causes of poisoning in horses and cattle and symptoms include loss of appetite, condition and constipation. During its latter stages, ragwort poisoning can cause horses to stagger and it can result in digestive disorders, irreversible liver damage and death.



Ragwort can be controlled by pulling the roots out of the soil, and burning the plants. In general, all weeds can be controlled by herbicides.

SECURITY

With theft on the increase, there are several ways to keep both your horse and equipment safe.

- **Get your horse or pony freeze-marked** with a unique number branded on the neck or back; or get your farrier to brand your postcode on your horse's hooves, although this will of course grow out in time.
- **Microchip your horse** - your vet will advise you on this. The advantages of microchipping are that it leaves no external marks, it is permanent and chips can be read at sales.
- **Photograph your horse** from different angles, with particular attention to distinctive marks.
- **Chain and padlock** both the latch and the hinge end of your gates.
- **Do not leave headcollars** on your horse or pony.
- **Mark your tack and equipment** with your postcode. Some tack shops will be able to mark your tack for you with security marking tools.
- **Secure your horse trailer or horsebox** with wheel clamps.



BREEDING

You should not breed indiscriminately. Both the mare and stallion should be proven in their field and have good conformation and temperaments. Ideally, breed from registered stock. Consider carefully what you will do with the horses you breed. Bear in mind that it will cost a minimum of £1,000 per year to raise a young horse. Seek advice from your veterinary surgeon and well-established breeders before you embark on breeding a foal.



VETERINARY SURGEONS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS THAT CAN PROVIDE A SERVICE FOR YOUR HORSE

It is important to register your horse with a local veterinary practice which has at least one veterinary surgeon who regularly attends horses. Only veterinary surgeons are legally empowered to investigate clinical problems such as lameness or sore backs; however, a vet may decide to utilise the help of a registered chiropractor, physiotherapist or dental technician to rehabilitate a horse.

HAVING YOUR HORSE OR PONY HUMANELY DESTROYED

It may be necessary, in the event of old age, ill health or as the result of an accident, to have your horse or pony put to sleep to prevent it from suffering pain and distress.

Your veterinary surgeon will be able to help you make a decision on whether the horse still has a good quality of life or whether it would be kinder to have the horse put down. Do not leave elderly animals to fend for themselves in fields. It is part of responsible horse ownership to ensure that your horse or pony has a dignified end.

Horses can be destroyed via either shooting or lethal injection. The first method can be carried out by the local knackerman, kennelman or veterinary surgeon as long as they possess a firearms certificate. Lethal injection can only be carried out by your veterinary surgeon. Both methods are instantaneous and painless. Whatever the method of destruction, there is a significant cost element and the practical consideration of disposal of the body. This is all part of responsible care of the horse. It is best to discuss the options and cost implications with your veterinary surgeon well in advance of a crisis arising, to allow a sensible plan of action to be formulated.

For a list of further reading and useful contact details, please turn to the back page of this booklet.

FURTHER READING

*The following titles are available directly from
Equine Veterinary Journal Ltd, Tel: 01638 666160*

- **The Complete Equine Emergency Bible**
K. Bush & K. Coumbe; *David and Charles*
- **How Your Horse Works**
S. McBane; *David and Charles*
- **The Injury-Free Horse**
A. Sutton; *David and Charles*
- **All About Worms**
S. Davidson; *J.A. Allen*
- **All About Laminitis**
K. Coumbe; *J.A. Allen*
- **Horse Care and Management**
C. Stafford & R. Oliver; *J.A. Allen*
- **The Horse: General Management**
J. Brega; *J.A. Allen*
- **Laminitis Explained**
D.W. Ramey; *Kenilworth Press*
- **Navicular Syndrome Explained**
D.W. Ramey; *Kenilworth Press*
- **No Foot, No Horse**
G. Martin & M. Deacon; *Kenilworth Press*
- **The BHS Veterinary Manual**
P.S. Hastie; *Kenilworth Press*
- **The BHS Complete Manual of Stable Management**
Kenilworth Press
- **Keeping a Horse at Grass**
V. Britton; *Crowood Press*
- **Keeping Horses**
S. McBane; *Blackwell Publishing*

USEFUL CONTACTS

British Equine Veterinary Association

Tel: 01223 836970, www.beva.org.uk

BEVA Trust

Tel: 01638 667600, www.beva.org.uk

British Horse Society

Tel: 08701 202244, www.bhs.org.uk

British Veterinary Association

Tel: 020 7636 6541, www.bva.co.uk

DEFRA

Tel: 0845 933 5577, www.defra.gov.uk

Farriers Registration Council

Tel: 01733 319911, www.farrier-reg.gov.uk

Humane Slaughter Association

Tel: 01582 831919, www.hsa.org.uk

National Equine Welfare Council

Tel: 01295 810060, www.newc.co.uk

Further copies of 'The Best of Care' are available from:

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