



Presented by

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SUMMER HEALTH MANAGEMENT

By Lucy Grieve
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Whilst most of us enjoy the summer months, this time of year can bring a number of health issues for our horses and ponies.

24 hour grazing

With the grass growing rapidly throughout the spring and early summer, many owners will turn their horses or ponies out 24-hours a day after a winter of being stabled for much of the time. They may find that they are soon faced with overweight horses, or worse, laminitis. It is important to monitor your horse's weight regularly using a weigh tape (even more accurate when used with the 'Texas University Formula') or body condition scoring* and restrict grazing time on lush grass. If you have concerns about managing your horse's weight or diet, seek advice from your vet or a qualified nutritionist.

Allergies

An allergy is an overreaction of the immune system to a usually harmless substance. The substance responsible is called the 'allergen', and these are broadly categorised as follows:

- **Skin allergens** – insect bite hypersensitivity ('sweet itch') is the most commonly recognised skin allergy in horses and is usually caused by

bites from the Culicoides midge. Other conditions include itchy skin (pruritus) and urticaria (hives), which presents as raised lumps or 'wheals'.

- **Respiratory allergens** are usually inhaled, such as dust, mould and pollen.
- **Ingested allergens** are usually eaten, in hay or other food types.

Skin conditions are usually diagnosed using the history, but may require hair pluck, skin scrape or biopsy samples to be examined in a laboratory. Diagnosing respiratory allergies is again very dependent on a detailed history, but may also require endoscopy examination with a tracheal wash or bronchoalveolar lavage sample being sent for laboratory analysis. As for humans, allergies

resulting from ingesting something are often only worked out by studying the history, but may also be identified by process of elimination. For all allergic reactions, it is preferable to remove your horse or pony from the source of the allergen and/or provide appropriate protection, before relying on symptomatic treatment.

Sunburn/ Photosensitisation

Horses with areas of pink skin are susceptible to sunburn and these areas (frequently on the face and limbs) require a high factor sun protection cream to be applied regularly to prevent redness, blistering, discomfort and peeling. In severe cases where skin is blistered or raw, seek veterinary advice. Repeated skin damage may possibly lead to longer-term

problems: thickening and scaling on the surface of the skin (keratosis), which may have unknown long-term consequences. Masks that cover the head and muzzle may provide some relief and fly rugs can help shield horses with more widespread sensitive areas.

Dehydration

Your horse or pony's water intake will increase significantly during hot weather and they should always have access to a clean and plentiful supply of water to prevent dehydration. If there are several horses in a field, ensure there is more than one source of water so that dominant horses don't prevent thirsty horses that are lower down the hierarchy from having access to the water trough. When travelling and competing your horse or pony, always take plenty of fresh water. If you are going on a long journey, make sure you stop regularly to offer your horse a drink and to check that the horse is not overheating. For those that don't drink well, consider adding apple juice or mint cordial to flavour the water to increase their water intake. Some horses prefer the taste of 'home water' so if you are away for a period of time, consider taking a supply with you.



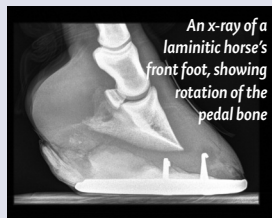
Shelter and Insect Protection

Horseflies, midges and other biting insects can be a big problem at this time of year and it is important that horses are offered some protection from these with UV fly rugs, masks and insect repellent, and by provision of adequate shelter. Use a well fitting rug that is lightweight, breathable and light in colour to reflect the heat. Ensure fly masks are fitted correctly and don't rub or make contact with the horse's eyes. Many horse owners will bring their horses in during the daytime heat of summer, and turn them out at night when it is cooler. Ensure the stable has good ventilation and is as free from dust as possible. If you don't have access to a stable, ensure there is sufficient shade in the paddock, either from trees or by providing a field shelter. It is important to remove manure from fields regularly, not only to prevent worm contamination but also to discourage flies. Likewise, remove any stagnant/standing water, which attracts flies and can act as a breeding ground for biting insects.

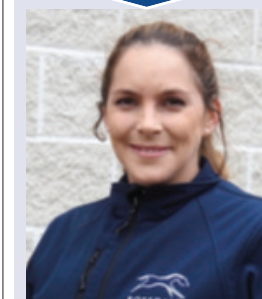
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How do I recognise Laminitis?

Clinical signs of acute laminitis range from subtle (heat in the hoof and coronet and an abnormally strong digital pulse) to more obvious (refusal to weight bear and/or move forward, and marked changes in gait and stance). Clinical signs of chronic laminitis include visible changes to the outside of the hoof, reflecting permanent changes in the position of the pedal bone within the foot. If you suspect a case of laminitis, contact your vet immediately.



VET PROFILE



Lucy Grieve is an ambulatory assistant at Rosssdales Equine Practice in Newmarket. After qualifying from Cambridge University in 2007, Lucy completed a diagnostic imaging internship at Rosssdales Equine Diagnostic Centre. She then spent seven years as an in-house vet for a large flat racing facility in Newmarket. She returned to Rosssdales in 2015, working mainly with pleasure horses and Thoroughbred horses in training. Her main areas of interest are lameness, diagnostic imaging and poor performance.

Lucy has been a member of the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) Council since 2012, serving as chair of the Ethics and Welfare Committee and sitting on the Equestrian Sports Committee, liaising with regulatory bodies such as the BHA and FEI. She is also co-opted onto the Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB) Thoroughbred Research Consultation Group, and was recently invited to sit on the Federation of European Equine Veterinary Associations Welfare Group.

Electrolyte supplementation
 Ideally, allow all horses free access to a salt block. If this is not possible, it can be advisable to supplement horses that have sweated significantly with one tablespoon (maximum) of salt in the feed per day. If you are unsure, however, seek veterinary advice as excessive salt could do more harm than good. Adding an electrolyte supplement to your horse's diet could help restore any electrolyte imbalances caused by sweating associated with heat, exercise or travel. However, electrolytes should not be fed in large amounts if the horse is not used to them, so it is recommended to split the electrolytes between 2 feeds, or put it in water, at least initially. These can also be administered in pastes, which is useful if given at a competition. If electrolytes are offered in water, offer the horse the option of plain water too.

Exercise, Travel and Competing
 When temperatures suddenly rise, horses will not be acclimatised to working in those conditions and preferably should not be worked during the hottest part of the day. The same applies when travelling – trailers and lorries can become extremely hot, particularly if they are standing stationary in traffic. Unless you have air conditioning or a cooling fan in the horse area of your lorry, your horse can become overheated and dehydrated in a short period of time. When competing in very hot conditions, allow a shorter warm-up period and be prepared for your horse to tire more quickly. Offer water after warming up, before competing and immediately after competing to reduce the risk of heat related health issues.



Cooling
 Use plenty of cold water to cool horses down after exercise. For horses that are sweating profusely in extremely hot temperatures, consider adding ice to the water to lower the horse's body temperature more quickly. It is recommended that the horse be walked for short periods until it has cooled down in order to prevent muscle problems.

Heat Stress
 Heat stress, also known as heat exhaustion or hyperthermia, is a condition that occurs with horses working in excessively hot or humid conditions. When the horse is unable to sufficiently lose body heat, its body temperature goes up rapidly, causing severe (and sometimes fatal) health issues. Therefore, heat stress must be treated promptly and thoroughly. Common causes are excessive exercise, hot weather, increased physical stress, obesity and respiratory diseases.

Signs of heat stress are:

- Heavy and/or rapid breathing (sometimes the horse appears to 'mouth-breathe' and

can develop to the more serious condition known as 'thumps')

- Rapid heart rate
- Excessive sweating
- Lethargy or restlessness
- Dark urine/reduced urination
- Rectal temperature higher than 103.5°F (about 39.8°C)
- Reduced/poor performance
- Abnormal (sometimes irregular) heart rhythm
- Muscle spasms
- Kicking out with the back legs
- Slow recovery after exercise
- Stumbling or attempting to go down
- Collapse and, in serious cases, convulsions

If your horse displays any of these signs, it is

important to use aggressive cooling methods to reduce the horse's temperature and to call your vet immediately, as it might be necessary to administer intravenous fluids and/or electrolytes. Severe heat stroke can lead to collapse, muscle damage, renal failure, liver damage and laminitis, and can be fatal if not treated immediately. Always seek veterinary help if you suspect a case of heat stress.

If you have any concerns about potential health issues in your horse or pony, always contact your vet for advice.
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**For advice on how to weight check your horse, see <https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-advice/how-check-weight-your-horse>*