

# Healthy as a Horse

BY ABIGAIL BOATWRIGHT

Keeping your horses healthy means giving them conscientious care. The products we've curated in this section are all designed to help you care for your horse, whether you're a serious competitor, a rancher, or somewhere in between. No matter what your horse's job is, being able to evaluate their vital signs is an important skill for any horseman. Joe Pluhar, DVM, MBA of Brazos Valley Equine Hospital in Navasota, Texas, shares tips on taking your horse's vital signs.

## CHECKING VITALS

### WHY YOU SHOULD CHECK VITALS YOURSELF

If your horse is visibly unwell, checking your horse's vital signs will help you determine if he's actually sick, and give you important info to share with your veterinarian. For instance, if you've just finished working your performance horse, checking his respiration rate can be a good indicator of how in shape they are and how his cardiovascular system is working.

"If they're still breathing really hard 15 to 20 minutes after you get done exercising, then either it's August in Texas and it's 110 degrees and they can't cool off... or maybe they're having a problem breathing or some other kind of issue that's making it hard for them to do their job," Pluhar says. "Being able to take your horse's vital signs can give you lots of clues, not only on your horse's health, but also your horse's ability to do their job."

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

At minimum you need a rectal thermometer. Pluhar also recommends something to take time — a watch, or a phone with a stopwatch. A stethoscope is also helpful, but not as crucial.

"If you have those two things, you can do a temperature, pulse and respiration rate check on your horse," Pluhar says.

### PULSE

The easiest way to take your horse's pulse is to place a stethoscope behind his left elbow and listen to the heartbeat. You can count the number of heartbeats over a 15-second interval and multiply by four to get beats per minute.

"Normal is usually in the 30 to 48 beats per minute range," Pluhar says.

The other way to take a pulse is without a stethoscope. The artery that runs across the horse's mandible, under their jaw, can be felt if you run your fingers down the mandible until you feel three cords that traverse from the outside to inside of the mandible.

"If you hold your fingers there, and the horse stands quietly, you can pick up the arterial pulse," Pluhar says. "It's the same procedure: count for 15 seconds, multiply by four. That's your beats per minute."

### TEMPERATURE

Make sure to take your horse's rectal temperature before giving any medications, Pluhar says. Purchase a good quality thermometer with a fast read for enhanced safety — you'll be standing in a dangerous spot for a shorter amount of time.

Don't take a temperature right after your horse defecates — you'll need to wait a few minutes. The average temperature is 99.5 to 101.5, but that also depends on ambient conditions.

"If it's 10 degrees outside, and the horse is standing outside with a 101.5 temperature, I'm probably going to think that horse has a fever," Pluhar says. "If it's a thousand degrees outside, the horse just got done running a reining pattern and the temperature is 103, I'm not going to worry about it. I'm going to rest the horse, cool it down and retake in a few minutes."

### RESPIRATION

Checking respiration rates can be tricky, Pluhar says, because horses are curious and like to sniff.

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"One of the easiest ways to do it is just put your hand on the chest or on the flank, and feel the horse breathe in and out," Pluhar recommends. "Count the number of breaths over a 15-second interval, multiple by four for breaths per minute."

Fifteen to 20 breaths per minute is normal, depending on ambient conditions. High temperatures outside will increase the respiratory rate, as well as exercise.

#### WHAT TO DO WITH THE INFO

It's a good idea to call your veterinarian with your gathered information. And make sure you take the temperature reading before giving any medication.

"A lot of people will give banamine before they call their veterinarian, if they think the horse is colicky," Pluhar says. "Banamine does a very good job of reducing fevers. The horse may not have been colicking at all, they may just have had a fever, and if you think the horse got better from a colic perspective, you could really be covering up a fever."

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—JOE PLUHAR, DVM, MBA

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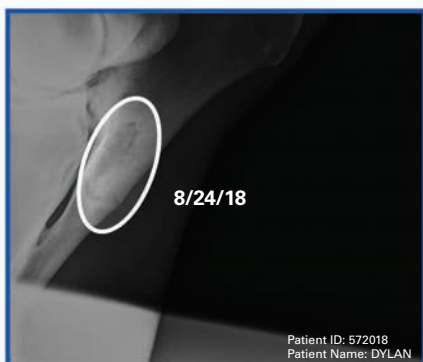
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[duralactin.com](http://duralactin.com)

## Vetericyn Hoof Care, Hoof Soak, and Liniment

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