



Southern Equine Consortium

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Forage Considerations for Horses in the Southeast: Part II Dangerous Plants

Courtney Phillips, Mississippi State University

In our last segment, we discussed forage management strategies to minimize the financial cost of horse care while maximizing forage quality and quantity. Although a carefully managed pasture may appear green and suitable for horses, harmful plants may still be lurking in your pasture. Knowing what species are prominent in your pasture and what plants to avoid can optimize management and prevent vet visits.

Some types of forages might be suitable for some species of livestock but can be detrimental to horses. Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), sudangrass (*Sorghum bicolor*), johnsongrass (*Sorghum halepense*), and particularly sorghum-sudangrass hybrids (*Sorghum bicolor*) are of interest as they are safe to feed as hay to horses but not as pasture. Horses grazing these young, immature forages can develop cystitis and ataxia (incoordination). Adams et al. (1969) reported urinary incontinence, bladder lesions, and degeneration of the spinal cord upon histopathologic analysis. Cystitis caused by these forages may be due to a toxin such as hydrocyanic acid.

Foxtail (*Setaria* spp.) can be a problem in horses due to its fine awns. These awns can imbed in the mouth leading to ulceration of the lips, gums, and tongue, irritation to the gastrointestinal tract, and irritation to the skin around the muzzle. Horses that suffer from hay blisters often present with lethargy, excess salivation, dysphagia, red and bleeding gums, and facial swelling (Johnson et al., 2012). Fortunately, these mouth ulcers resolve when horses are removed from feed sources containing foxtail. Additional problems can arise with riding horses due to the pain caused by the embedded awns or secondary infection. There is no herbicide specifically for foxtail, so managing pasture to prevent seed head formation and checking hay for foxtail can prevent the problem.

Alsike cover (*Trifolium hybridum*) is a perennial cool-season legume that is dangerous as both pasture and hay to horses. Alsike clover poisoning is proposed to be caused by an alkaloid toxin that damages liver cells. When ingested, this compound causes liver cirrhosis that prevents adequate blood filtration. When plants are ingested, chlorophyll is converted to phylloerythrin in the digestive



Sharp awns from foxtail can cause mouth ulcers that may lead to infection.

Image: www.thehorse.com

Editors:

Dr. Neely Walker
nwalker@agcenter.lsu.edu
LSU AgCenter

Dr. Carissa Wickens
cwickens@ufl.edu
University of Florida



Photosensitization on the hind legs of a horse. Image: Dr. Israel Yeruham, Koret School of Veterinary Medicine

tract. Phylloerythrin is usually removed from the blood stream by the liver. When liver cirrhosis is present, excess phylloerythrin accumulates in skin cells and reacts to certain wavelengths of light. This results in the blistering and sloughing of skin, which is most prevalent in areas with little hair or no pigmentation (Nation, 1989). Liver failure is the most common cause of death in these cases, but horses afflicted with alsike poisoning at the beginning stages of ingestion can recover when removed from the pasture.

Many producers know there are risks of feeding tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) to horses. However, many don't realize how tall fescue affects horses and which varieties of tall fescue are safe. The seed head of tall fescue can be affected by an endophyte fungus called *Neotyphodium coenophialum* (Ball et al., 2015). Although this fungus is not harmful to the plant, the ergot alkaloids produced are highly toxic to livestock. In mares, tall fescue toxicity can cause abortions, prolonged gestation, dystocia, thickened or retained placenta, agalactia (no milk produced), and an increase in newborn mortality. Breeding stallions experience a decrease in ejaculate volume but there is

no significant effect on sperm motility or morphology (Fayrer-Hosken et al., 2008). Careful management can reduce the effects of fescue toxicosis such as removing mares at least 90 days prior to parturition and overseeding with another forage to dilute the effects of the alkaloid. Additionally, alternate varieties of tall fescue are commercially available and are safe to feed to horses. Novel (non-toxic) endophyte infected tall fescue and endophyte free tall fescue are good alternatives. However, these stands are not as vigorous as toxic endophyte-infected stands so careful management must be considered to maintain stand longevity and to prevent encroachment from toxic endophyte infected tall fescue (Ball et al., 2015).

In summary, awareness of forages that can be toxic or harmful to the horse ensures a productive operation with limited expenditure on vet bills. Understanding what forages are prevalent in a pasture and how to sustain them can be useful tools when managing horses. Remember—just because a pasture is green doesn't mean it is safe for horses!

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Recognizing & Addressing Behavioral Problems: What is my horse telling me?

Dr. Carissa Wickens, University of Florida

cwickens@ufl.edu

Paying attention to your horse's behavior, specifically learning how to recognize changes in behavior and to address behavioral problems appropriately are extremely important to ensuring your horse's health and well-being and to maintaining a positive horse-human relationship. It is often easy to place blame on the horse for problem behaviors as we may attribute negative changes in behavior to the horse being disobedient. Horses, like people can experience a "bad day" every now and again, but when behavior changes persist or become more severe, an underlying physical or psychological problem is frequently the cause of the undesirable behavior. Identifying the origin of the problem will allow for effective treatment and/or adjustments in management that can result in improvements in the horse's behavior.

By observing horses regularly:

- We learn what is "normal" behavior for a particular horse
- We pay attention to horse body language and are more likely to notice changes in behavior
- We can better detect and more quickly address physical problems and/or management issues

Changes in Behavior and Potential Causes

- Changes in behavior can include the following:
- Negative attitude towards work
- Decline in performance
- Hyper-reactivity, spookiness, bolting
- Undesirable behaviors such as:
 - * Kicking
 - * Biting
 - * Teeth-grinding
 - * Head tossing
 - * Self-mutilation

Some potential causes of attitude changes and reluctance to work include:

- Gastric ulcers/abdominal discomfort
- Soreness in the horse's back or limbs
 - Need to evaluate and determine the source of pain (e.g. some problem behaviors can be attributed to ill-fitting tack)
- Conflict behaviors in response to inconsistent training methods/cues
- Difficulty with thermoregulation (e.g. horses with anhidrosis)



Excessive reactivity and severe anxiousness in horses may indicate an underlying physical problem. Photo courtesy of University of Minnesota Extension.

Excessive reactivity and anxious behaviors may be the result of the following:

- High carbohydrate diet (feeds high in sugar/starches)
- Vision problems
- Pain or fear (facial expressions and body postures can indicate discomfort and arousal)
- Inadequate training/preparation for transport, competition, etc.
- Separation from other horses
- Temperament characteristics
- Undesirable behaviors can range from avoidance behaviors and head-tossing, to kicking and biting, or more severe, injurious behaviors such as flank-biting. In many cases of flank biting behavior or when

Recognizing & Addressing Behavioral Problems, continued.

we observe horses becoming increasingly aggressive towards people and/or other horses, an underlying physical problem or abnormality is often a contributing factor. Avoidance behaviors such as shying away, rearing, and bucking/kicking out may result from pain or fear associated with unpleasant stimuli, but may also become learned behaviors as a result of inappropriate timing of reinforcements during training and handling. Keep in mind that changes in behavior such as lethargy, withdrawal from pasture mates and/or people, abnormal body, head and neck postures may also indicate a problem.



This horse's facial expressions are those exhibited in response to pain. Notice the tightened lips, strained nostril, prominent chin, tension above the eye, and stiff backward ear position. Photo courtesy of Carissa Wickens.

Solutions and Take Home Messages

Figuring out the source of your horse's behavior change and addressing equine behavioral issues can be challenging. Knowing what is "normal" behavior for your horse (e.g. eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, body postures and facial expressions, behavior towards other horses, people, etc.) will help you recognize when your horse is uncomfortable or stressed. This information is essential in order to determine the reason for the change in behavior or behavior problem. Moreover, the behavior could have more than one cause (i.e. the behavior may be the result of a combination of factors).

It is helpful to consider the context of the behavior, i.e. making note of when and where the behavior occurs. What else is happening in the horse's environment when the horse displays the behavior? It is often a good idea to record some video of the horse's behavior so that you have a visual account of what is happening. Collecting video of the horse alone in his/her stall or paddock or during times of the day when there is less activity around the farm can also reveal important information. Video is especially helpful as you work closely with your veterinarian to rule out pain/physical conditions.

When tackling behavioral problems, be patient and willing to make changes, however avoid making too many changes at once so that you can observe which treatment or adjustment in management or training has been effective. Always consider your own safety, the safety of the horse, and of those around you, and recognize when you need to seek outside help.

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The Horse. <http://www.thehorse.com/>

(Search for articles on behavior/behavioral problems)

Managing the Anxious Horse <http://www.thehorse.com/articles/37095/managing-the-anxious-horse>

Transportation: 10 Tips to Minimize the Stress

Dr. Jill Bobel, University of Florida
jbrides2@ufl.edu

Transportation is an integral part of owning horses. The stress accompanying transportation can cause metabolic and immune dysfunction leading to poor performance and increased risk of infection. Horses are subjected to many stressors during transportation; physical restraint from normal activity, abnormal head carriage, close proximity to other horses, isolation from herd mates, novel surroundings, exposure to new pathogens, extreme temperatures, water and/or feed deprivation, dust, particulate matter and breathing ammonia tainted air.

A recent online survey of horse transportation-related health problems indicated that respiratory problems were most frequently reported (33.7%), followed by gastrointestinal problems (23.8%) and injuries (16.3%) (Padalino et al., 2017). This survey and previous studies indicate that journey duration is positively associated with development of serious health problems and journeys longer than 24 hours pose the greatest risk. Compared to travel lasting less than 8 hours, the likelihood of respiratory diseases was 15 times greater on journeys of 8-24 hours and 100 times greater on journeys of more than 24 hours. Although we cannot eliminate the stress, studies conducted over the past decade have revealed some ways to mitigate stress before, during, and after the trip.

1. Ulcer prevention before transport

Horses are highly prone to stomach ulcers and this process is accelerated during fasting conditions. Although the horse may have access to hay during transport, many horses will choose not to eat. Horses tend to eat more during the first 1-2 hours and will decrease intake as the journey continues. Researchers demonstrated as little as 4 hours of transport induced ulcers in horses that had none prior to departure (McClure, Carithers, Gross, & Murray, 2005). Medicated ulcer prevention, such as omeprazole, cimetidine or ranitidine, at least 1 hour before transport and/or providing appetizing hay during the trip can help reduce the risk of ulcers. Of course, do not provide hay with which the horse is not accustomed.

2. Tied or loose in the trailer?

For safety reasons, a common management practice is to tether horses with a halter and lead during transport. Horses rely heavily on the ability to lower their head and drain respiratory accumulations through their nose. Normally, inhaled dust and allergens from hay being eaten off the ground would be easily eliminated by this method of gravity flow. The inability to lower their head during transit and drain inhaled particles, contributes to increased risk of respiratory infection following transportation. The obvious solution to this problem is to not tie them; however loose horses stand with their heads elevated in order to maintain balance while the trailer is in motion. Head elevation during transportation cannot be totally eliminated but loose horses benefit from the ability to lower their heads during rest stops.

3. Upon arrival, let their head down!

Once you arrive at your destination, encourage your horse to lower their head so they can drain the accumulated debris. If possible, place hay on the ground or allow the horse to graze. Providing turnout after transportation is not only beneficial for nasal drainage but also stimulates circulation and helps to stretch their legs. If you do not have access to a stall or turnout, unloading your horse and allowing them to eat from the ground is better than leaving them on the trailer with a raised hay net.



Photo Credit: Gray Parks

4. To hay or not to hay?

Providing hay during transport is beneficial for ulcer prevention, promoting gastrointestinal tract movement and alleviating boredom but it also increases the amount of inhaled dust and allergens. Most studies agree that inhaled particles are undesirable but one study showed horses that had hay during transport, actually inhaled less particles compared to horses without hay (Allano et al., 2016). The researchers suggested low hanging hay nets in the trailer encouraged horses to lower their heads thereby increasing nasal drainage. Ultimately, providing hay during transit, possibly low hanging, is more beneficial than not.

5. Feed wet hay during transport

One solution to minimize particle inhalation is to feed damp or wet hay. Additionally, because voluntary water intake will decrease during transportation, feeding wet hay will help decrease the risk of dehydration. Because some horses may not readily eat wet hay, horses should be properly acclimated before transportation. Upon arrival at your destination, offering wet instead of dry feed will help rehydrate and prevent choking since the horses will likely be hungry and eat quickly. Wet hay not consumed within 24 hours should be disposed of to prevent mold growth. Although wet hay will help increase water intake, planned rest stops to offer water in buckets are also necessary.

6. Plan for rest stops every 2-4 hours

Rest stops are very important for several reasons. Water, preferably from their home farm, should be offered in buckets at least every 4 hours. During transport, dehydration can occur within 8-24 hours and is accelerated by hot conditions or decreased intake of hay. In these situations, water should be offered more frequently. Fortunately, recovery from dehydration can occur within hours of rehydration. You can offset a difference in water taste and encourage drinking by using a flavoring agent, if the horse is properly acclimated before transport (Mars, Kiesling, Ross, Armstrong, & Murray, 1992). Rest stops are also important to allow male horses to urinate. This is a difficult action while the trailer is moving because of the posture and balance required. If possible, cleaning the trailer during rest stops will also help eliminate noxious gases and may reduce stress.



Photo Credit: Dr. Jill Bobel

7. Orientation in trailer is individual

Many studies have investigated horses traveling rear-facing, forward-facing or slant-loaded. Scientifically speaking there is no advantage to these orientations and it appears to be based on individual preference. Likely some horses prefer to ride rear-facing to avoid a saddle compartment at the front of the trailer or because the back of the trailer is more open and light compared to the “dark cave” aspect at the front of the trailer. Slant-load trailers may be more desirable to some horses because each stall has a window and the stalls are often bigger. One researcher suggested that when turning a trailer, rear or forward facing horses must lean diagonally whereas slant-loaded horses’ are already oriented perpendicular to centrifugal forces of the turn and can more easily maintain balance; however this has yet to be proven.

8. Driver’s experience is important- go slow!

Accelerating, decelerating and turning require the most balance and muscle activity by horses. Heart rate and muscle activity related to maintaining balance are both strongly affected by the driver’s experience. One study showed horses transported by inexperienced drivers had higher heart rates and more muscle activity indicating continual postural adjustment to maintain balance (Giovagnoli, Trabalza Marinucci, Bolla, & Borghese, 2002). Although studies show driving style and experience can increase or decrease the associated stress, it is unclear whether this translates into hindered performance or

Transportation: 10 tips to Minimize the Stress, continued.

increased risk of infection. In general, drivers should navigate turns slowly and gradually accelerate and/or decelerate to reduce the effort required for the horses to maintain balance.

9. Muscle usage during transport

Several studies have investigated muscle usage and energy expenditure over various distances. Most agree that muscle usage during transport is similar to the horse undergoing moderate exercise. Based on metabolic processes within the body, one study found that 186 miles of transport was similar to cantering for 0.93 miles (Codazza, D., Maffeo, G. and Redaelu, G., 1974). Another study reported the energy used during 30 minutes of walking was similar to 30 minutes of transport even though the horses are standing still (Doherty, Booth, Waran, Salthouse, & Cuddeford, 1997). Overall, transport requires active participation by the horse to maintain balance and this should be taken into account when transporting to competitions.

10. If transporting >8 hours, rest should be given

In many cases, duration of transport has the largest effect on the associated stress and risk of negative health outcomes. Research has indicated transporting for >8 hours without rest can hinder performance. However, journeys of any length immediately before competitions can also reduce performance, particularly when horses are less experienced travelers (Covalesky, Russoniello, & Malinowski, 1992; Slade, 1987). If transportation to a competition requires >8 hours of travel, consider overnighting somewhere to allow the horses to recover. Alternatively, you can provide rest by stopping the trailer and untying the horses so they can lower their heads. Based on the transportation induced elevation of muscle enzymes, a recovery period of 2 hours for every 3 hours of travel has been suggested (Tateo, Padalino, Boccaccio, Maggiolino, & Centoducati, 2012). Although rest is less important if there is no physical exertion required upon arrival, transportation stress can still cause many unwelcome side effects and rest should be considered for all horses being transported. Horses should not be transported for >18 hours without being unloaded and allowed physical exercise.

Transport stress is not uniform but caused by a variety of simultaneous stressors from many different sources. This complex stressor triggers a physiological response that can produce undesirable health outcomes. Research has shown horses may require 10 transport episodes to become familiarized with the process (Schmidt et al., 2010). Although we know horses can acclimate to transportation and be less psychologically affected, the physical stressors remain. It is important to remember that horses will continue to be challenged with stressors upon arrival at their destination but these steps will help minimize the physical effects of transportation and promote faster recovery.

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Electrolytes for the Performance Horse

Dr. Neely Walker, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
nwalker@agcenter.lsu.edu



Photo Credit: Dr. Neely Walker

Electrolyte supplementation is vital to a performance horse's overall health and athletic ability. Electrolytes are involved in the control of multiple physiologic processes within the body including muscle contraction, thirst regulation, nerve function, blood pH, and hydration. Sweating is your horse's primary method of thermoregulation and during performance events; horses may lose a large quantity of sodium (Na⁺), potassium (K⁺) and chloride (Cl⁻) through sweat. Electrolyte imbalance caused by prolonged exercise or sweating can lead to fatigue, muscle weakness, reduced performance, dehydration, and in extreme cases even death. Therefore, it is crucial that your performance horse begins any athletic activity hydrated with properly balanced electrolytes to ensure peak performance.

The best source of electrolyte replacement is a fortified grain, which will provide enough sodium (Na⁺) and chloride (Cl⁻) and a good quality hay will contain adequate potassium (K⁺) for the idle or lightly worked horse. Research has shown however that athletic horses benefit from additional electrolyte supplementation before and after competition. Horses who are supplemented with electrolytes prior to an exercise bout were able to perform 33% longer than horses who were not given electrolytes. Although it is ben-

eficial to provide electrolytes prior to exercise, complete recovery does not occur until 20 hours following athletic performance. Providing water alone to a horse with electrolyte imbalances will only further dehydrate your horse. Therefore it is important to continue electrolyte supplementation following exercise to restore your horse to its optimal performance level.

There are many electrolyte products available, however when choosing one for your horse make sure that sodium chloride (salt or NaCl) and potassium chloride (KCl) are the first two ingredients. Many believe that the addition of sugar (dextrose) into the formula will increase the electrolyte uptake. Research, however has shown that electrolytes containing sugar did not change the rate of water or ion uptake when compared to a solution without sugar. It is also important to note that if you choose a formula containing sugar for ease of administration, you will not meet the salt recommendations without feeding abnormally high doses.

The easiest way to administer additional electrolytes is to add it to your horse's water, however, always provide an additional source of clean drinking water until they become adapted to the taste. You can also mix them with feed or dose them with an oral syringe by adding a small amount of water. Some researchers suggest that mineral and salt blocks may create a taste aversion due to the high concentration, and may not be the optimal source of sodium for athletic horses.

Electrolytes are essential nutrients for athletic horses. Feeding quality hay and grain will provide adequate electrolyte balance for a lightly worked horse, while animals expected to perform at a higher level will require additional electrolyte supplementation to attain maximum performance. Performance horses have specific nutritional needs to sustain their career, and electrolyte supplementation is one way to ensure the success and overall health of your horse.

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Assessing Your Horse's Health: The Importance of TPR & Other Vital Signs

Dr. Carissa Wickens, University of Florida

cwickens@ufl.edu

Vital signs

Learning how to take your horse's vital signs can help you detect when there is a problem (e.g. illness or injury). Recording your horse's vital signs will also allow you to pass valuable information along to your veterinarian in cases of emergency. Periodically monitoring and recording your horse's vital signs (when the horse is healthy) and understanding the normal ranges (Figure 1) will help you recognize and address potential health issues. Assessing the horse's vital signs generally includes checking temperature, pulse (heart rate), and respiration, or TPR, but additional, important components of a thorough physical exam are described below.

Recognizing the healthy horse

When performing a physical exam on a horse, the first and often most important thing to do is to study the horse's appearance and demeanor. You want to see if the horse looks alert and comfortable, or lethargic and depressed. Next, you should look for any signs of pain or illness. When you start to look at the head, you want to make sure the eyes are bright, and that there is no discharge coming from the horse's eyes or nose. You should check for how they are breathing, eating, defecating and urinating. Also observe whether the horse's coat is shiny or dull.

Checking temperature in the horse

The best way to take a temperature in the horse is rectally. It is the most common way of determining whether or not a horse has a fever. The easiest thermometer to use is the *digital* thermometer. Digital thermometers can be purchased inexpensively from an equine tack or veterinary supply catalog or from your local pharmacy. To take the horse's temperature, first, you should cover the end of the thermometer with a lubricant (e.g. medical jelly). After you have made sure that you are standing close to the horse's left side at the horse's hindquarter, you will hold the tail to the side. This should help you see the anus. You carefully insert the thermometer, and rotate it as you push in about 2 or 3 inches. Wait up to one minute until the reading is finished (some thermometers will give a quicker reading).

Finding the horse's heart rate or pulse

To find the heart rate, you can use a stethoscope to listen to the horse's heart. You will find the heart rate behind the elbow, on the left side of the horse and along the girth line. Sometimes, it is easier to get a heart rate if the horse's left foot is positioned slightly in front of the right. If you do not have a stethoscope handy, you can also find the heart rate by putting your fingers on the facial artery underneath the horse's jaw, or the digital artery at the back of the horse's pastern. For either method, you will count the number of beats you hear or feel for one minute. It is also acceptable to count the number of beats for 30 seconds and then multiply the number you get by two to get the heart rate. Equine heart rate monitors can also be used to measure and track heart rate in horses. Some of the newer heart rate monitors have a built-in GPS feature and/or computer interface which allows data to be easily collected, stored, and analyzed. Heart rate monitors may be especially helpful for exercise and training/fitness applications and are being used more frequently in horse behavior and welfare research.

Checking for respiration

Respiration will increase during exercise and discomfort or pain. It will also decrease when the horse is at rest. The best way to assess the respiration rate is to watch the horse's flank. You should watch the flank rise and fall, and count each rise and fall as one breath. How many times you count in one minute will give you the horse's respiratory rate.

Inspecting for good blood flow and checking hydration in the horse

To make sure blood is circulating properly all throughout the body, you want to check the color of the gums. All you need to do is lift up the top lip of the horse and make sure that you see a medium pink color on the gums. The easiest way to assess circulation is to check **capillary refill time (CRT)**. This means that you will press your finger against the gums for a few seconds. As soon as you let go, the area will be white. Now you want to count how many seconds it takes for the pink color to return. However many seconds you count is the capillary refill time of that horse (top photo). Something else you can monitor is the hydration status of the horse by performing a **skin pinch test** (bottom photo). Pick an area of skin where the neck ties into the shoulder. Use your thumb and pointer finger to gently pinch some skin and hold it out away from the horse's body for a few seconds. Let go, and wait for the skin to fall back in place. If it does not fall back in place within two seconds, this may be a sign that the horse is dehydrated. (Photo credit: Dr. Carissa Wickens)



Checking for lameness

Lameness is defined as an asymmetry in gait, a problem with how the horse moves or stands. Lameness in horses has many causes including musculoskeletal injuries or hoof problems, neurological disorders, or pain and inflammation resulting from these or other conditions. To evaluate a horse for lameness, you should watch how the horse moves at the walk and trot. You should also watch how the horse trots in a circle and on a hard surface. Hoof testers can be used to apply pressure to areas of the foot to help detect and locate pain in the horse's feet.

Listening for gut sounds

To help assess whether your horse's gastrointestinal tract is functioning normally, you can listen for gut sounds (periodic gurgling sounds heard as food is moving through the digestive tract) by placing your ear over the horse's right and left flank. Lack of gut sounds or extremely active gut sounds may indicate a problem particularly when taken in context with other vital signs and general observations of the horses' appearance and behavior. For example, a horse experiencing colic may produce little to no manure for some time, have little to no gut sounds, have an elevated heart and respiration rate and show other signs of discomfort, such as getting up and down frequently, pawing, looking at its sides.

Figure 1. Reference ranges for vital signs in the horse.

	Adult Horse	Newborn Foal
Temperature	99-101°F (37.2-38.3°C)	99.5-102.1°F (37.5-38.9°C)
Pulse	28-44 beats per minute	80-100 beats per minute
Respiration	12-24 breaths per minute	20-40 breaths per minute
Mucous membranes	Moist, healthy pink color	
Capillary refill time*	Two seconds or less	
Gut sounds	Gurgling, gaslike growls, "tinkling" sounds (fluid), and occasionally "roars"	

Table adopted from The Horse.

References

Normal Horse Vital Signs and Health Indicators

<http://www.thehorse.com/articles/31854/normal-horse-vitals-signs-and-health-indicators>

Performing Physical Exam and Vital Signs. 2017 Florida Equine Institute Proceedings

<https://mediasite.video.ufl.edu/Mediasite/Play/20ac1cfab315444390b093945c97e3451d>

Horse Buying Checklist

Dr. Mark Russell, University of Arkansas

mrrussell@uaex.edu

This time of year, we start to see a little bit of green coming out in the pastures while the new grass starts to grow again. Also with the warming weather, most horse owners or enthusiasts start to think about showing or buying another horse. The talented horses with ability have continued to sell well, but there are always those horses that make buying a huge temptation due to their low price. Whether as a veteran buyer or novice, there are some items to consider making that purchase:

1. Ask for health history of the horse.
 - Has he/she ever foundered?
 - Has he/she ever coliced?
 - What condition are his/her feet in?
 - Are there any visible injuries or scars?
 - When was the last time he/she had vaccinations and was de-wormed?
 - Has he/she worn shoes before?
 - What does the current owner feed?
2. Ask to have the horse lunged or ridden to observe behavior and movement.
 - Is the horse sound?
 - Does he/she buck?
 - Ride the horse yourself to see if you “click”
 - Can he/she be tied without sitting back?
 - Can he/she be clipped?
 - Is he/she easy to catch?
 - Is he/she kid safe?
 - Does he/she spook easy?
3. What type of trailer is he/she used to riding in?
 - Can the horse load without problem?
 - Does the horse back out of the trailer?
4. What is the job/event you are hoping to do with this horse?
 - Is the horse well suited for the discipline based on breed, conformation, athletic ability, temperament?
 - Will he/she need more training or only maintenance?
 - Is the horse arena sour?
5. How long has the current owner had the horse?
 - Where was he/she born and can the horse adapt to the climate in which it will now live?
 - How many owners has he/she had?
6. What are the possible reasons the horse is being sold?
7. Does the seller have a positive reputation for selling good horses?
8. What type of facility is the horse used to?
 - Many horses have only lived in a pasture or stall.
 - Many horses are used to a certain type of fence.
9. If applicable, when was the horse gelded?
10. Take a transfer of ownership form with you so that everything can be taken care of at once.
11. Take someone with you who is knowledgeable and may notice something you don't.
 - Consult with a veterinarian and have vet checked if possible.
 - Should also take a farrier with you if possible.

