

Normal Horse Vitals

There are times when you are out riding with your horse and something just doesn't feel right. Your horse (or someone else's) is off and seems disturbed, upset or panicky about something. There are some basic things that you can check to determine if there is a problem to investigate. The secret is either memorizing these things or having them written down and put in your saddle bags so that you will have access to them.

So what are the **NORMAL** Vital Signs of a normal horse?

Heart Rate: 30-40 beats a minute at rest (higher for younger horses). Take pulse from under the left side of the chest near the elbow. Over 80 at rest is a serious problem. Properly trimmed feet and movement will aid in the heart's performance at rest and at work.

Respiratory Rate: 12-20 beats per minute at rest. This rate should never exceed the heart pulse rate.

Internal Body Temperature: 37.5 degrees Celsius...if above 39 degrees Celsius, contact your veterinarian immediately. Non-breakable thermometers in the anus work best--just don't lose it. Some tie a cord to it and alligator clip it to horse's tail.

Capillary refill time: This is the time it takes for color to return to a horse's gum tissue adjacent to its teeth after pressing and releasing with your finger. It should be 2 seconds or less.

Membrane color: The color of the mucus membranes of gums, conjunctiva (inner eye tissue) and inner lips of vulva should be salmon pink. Bright red, pale pink to white or bluish purple coloring indicate problems and a need to contact your vet.

Dehydration--The old skin pliability test: Just pinch or fold a flap of skin on neck and then quickly release it. It should immediately snap back into place. Failure to do so is evidence of dehydration. Find some water and some shade.

Excretions: The color, consistency and volume of feces and urine should be typical of your horse's usual excretions. Note any straining or failure to excrete.

Presence of gut sounds: Put your ear up to the belly and listen. If you hear noises (burbling) then all is well. Absence of such gaseous activity is indicative of a problem in the gut.

If you pay attention to these vital signs, you can tell when your horse is in trouble and get help for it sooner and avoid lengthy and costly rehabilitations. Contact your vet if you have any concerns.