IN THIS ISSUE

Last month we went through a list of items to consider before starting our horses in a conditioning program. This included their current BCS, soundness, hoof condition and tack fit. But where do you start from there? It is important to be realistic when beginning a conditioning program. How much time do you have to spend with your horse? How frequently will you be able to ride or exercise your horse? What is the time frame that you expect to see fitness changes in your horse? Do you have a competition goal or a prolonged trail ride in mind? Will your horse be working at faster speeds, over uneven terrain? All of these questions should help you develop a program that works for you and your horse.

Even if your horse has not been receiving regular exercise, he may have some baseline fitness depending on his lifestyle. Horses housed in pastures with free access to exercise maintain fitness more so than horses housed in stalls or small paddocks. In fact, in some cases, pasture housed horses may show similar fitness to horses that are stalled and receive exercise! The size of the pasture and herd mate personalities will also affect baseline fitness. Obviously horses that live with more rambunctious partners will spend more time galloping about than a herd of lazy wanderers.

**Just Breathe!**

by Elisabeth Giedt, DVM, MBA, Director of Outreach & Extension, Oklahoma State University Center for Veterinary Health Sciences

The horse is an athlete and requires a healthy respiratory system to be successful. Horses’ lungs are exposed to a variety of insults on a daily basis. With our dry and windy environment, the horse is challenged to clear dust and debris from its respiratory system daily. The upper airway, including the hairs inside the nose all the way to the cilia (tiny hairlike projections on the surface of cells) in the trachea, is specifically designed to help with this process. The production of mucus assists with the removal of dust and debris. When your horse’s nose runs, or they coughs they may be clearing their respiratory system.

- Protect your horse from contagious and infectious disease. Discuss a vaccination program with your veterinarian to include respiratory diseases such as influenza, herpes/rhino and strangles.
- Control dust in the environment:
  - Provide a wind break for horses.
  - Control dust in the stall or stable by watering down the aisles
    - Watering before raking or sweeping can reduce the dust
    - Do not use leaf blowers to clean the aisles.
  - Control dust in the riding arena by watering. In addition, there are products that can be added to the arena footing to help hold moisture in the footing.
  - Choose a bedding that reduces dust in the stall. While being absorbent, some beddings can also be quite dusty.

(continued)
Choose your hay wisely. Hay that has been cut late or stored for more than a year can appear green but also be full of dust. There are methods to steam or soak hay to control the dust; but it is easier to purchase a high quality product. Feed hay from the ground not in a hay net or rack. The entire respiratory system functions more effectively when the horse is allowed to put its head down.

If you are hauling horses in a trailer consider the effect of moving air on any bedding or hay fed in the trailer. It may be nice for the horse and easier to clean up if you use shavings or sawdust to collect the urine. However, these products may blow around at 60 MPH making for a dusty environment. In addition, feeding hay from a net may also blow around the particulate matter in the hay. Consider soaking hay before hauling. Also, horses should be allowed to drop their heads and clear their respiratory system every few hours during trailering. *see note on soaking hay below

If your horses are housed in a barn or run in shed, be sure that the area has good airflow and good air quality to promote respiratory wellness. Ammonia is a significant irritant to the respiratory system

Avoid storing hay above the stalls. This can expose the horse to more respiratory irritants. If this is unavoidable, place a large tarp down before stacking the hay above the stalls.

When cleaning stalls and aisle ways or moving hay, sweeping, or raking, consider moving the horses outside prior to cleaning and kicking up the dust.

Keep barns and stalls free of cobwebs and other materials that collect dust.

Choose which windows and doors to leave open based on the wind direction and speed.

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Saying WHOA! to Trailer Woes
by Kris Hiney, PhD, Equine Extension Specialist, Oklahoma State University

Do you dread loading your horse? Have you ever been late, or even had to skip an event because your horse wouldn’t get on the trailer? Have you or your horse ever been injured due to behavioral issues with trailers? Well, first off, know that you are not alone. A 2016 study found that 39% of horse owners have either trouble loading their horses or trouble once they are finally in! So do horses just truly hate riding in horse trailers, or are we doing a poor job of training them?

First, try to examine when your problems begin to occur. Does your horse get worried when you add shipping boots or other protective equipment associated with the trailer? Do they worry about being separated from their herd mates? Or is it simply the appearance of the trailer that begins their anxiety?

What about the loading process itself? Many owners have experienced the frustration of getting horses on a trailer. If you truly think about it, there is a lot going on that can make a horse uncomfortable. The horse not only has to leave its normal environment, but has to move into a confined space that may be dark or accompanied by an unstable surface.

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Soaking hay:
Wetting hay to control dust doesn’t take long. Spraying the hay with the hose is inadequate. Ideally place the flakes of hay in a muck tub and place a brick on top to immerse the hay in the water. Generally this takes less than five minutes. You may feed the wet hay from the ground as recommended.
The trailer design may impact its readiness to load as well. My personal experience is that horses are more willing to step up into a trailer than use a ramp, which has been borne out by similar published studies. That doesn’t mean you have to sell your ramp trailer, but you may need to be more patient in the training process.

Trailering itself can be stressful for the horse as well. Think of all they have to adapt to – new horses, the footing, acceleration/deceleration, changes in their feeding schedule, temperature fluctuations, dust, exhaust fumes etc. And once you finally get there, some horses either refuse to unload or fly violently backwards in their rush to leave that crazy contraption.

So if you have trailering issues, should you just stay home and leave your horse in the pasture? Absolutely not, but it is important to think of the process of retraining your horse as exactly that, a process that may not be necessarily completed in a day.

As trailer loading can be a dangerous process, both for the horse and the human, it is important to have a thorough understanding of horse behavior and training. Horses are most commonly trained through a process of operant conditioning. Horses are presented with a stimulus and then are either reinforced or punished for their resulting reaction. Simply put we either want the horse to repeat the action and provide reinforcement or do not want them to repeat the action – and therefore provide punishment. Note, punishment does not mean abuse, pain or fear – it simply means we want to discourage a behavior from happening again. The most common type of reinforcement used in horse training is negative reinforcement – where we remove something aversive from the horse when they perform the correct behavior. In horse training lingo, that is what we mean by a release or removing the pressure.

I’ll start with the most common mistakes that I see, and address other issues in future articles. One of the largest issues I see is when people try to rush the horse, and fail to recognize when it made an “attempt” to go forward. Pressure (our stimulus) during the loading process is either physical (pressure on a lead rope), audible – (claps, sounds etc.) or even more psychological – a flag waving behind them for example. For operant conditioning to work, the stimulus must immediately cease (negative reinforcement) when a horse makes some motion towards the trailer. That may mean ears flicked forward, head dropping to investigate, one step forward etc. As horse owners we are too focused on the final goal, and fail to reward all of the pieces that go into loading onto the trailer. Acknowledgement of the “try” the horse has shown is key. When the horse does not experience any lessening of pressure for a correct response, fear and anxiety can result and can strengthen the horse’s negative response to loading into the trailer.

Practice loading when you don’t need to go somewhere on a time schedule. One of the key contributors to loading issues is a rushed owner who is already frustrated. If our emotional state is already heightened concerning trailers – believe me the horse picks up on that! Again, think of loading a horse onto a trailer as a true training exercise. We wouldn’t expect perfection on a riding maneuver the first time we attempted it would we?

Final thoughts. Often as owners we may not realize our timing in providing a horse a release is off. Have an experienced friend help out by observing what you are doing, or even video a training session. You may be surprised by what you learn.

Next month – we will talk in more detail about specific issues and ways to address them.

Upcoming Events

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
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<td>June 21-23, 2018</td>
<td>Oklahoma 4-H State Horse Show, Lazy E Arena</td>
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<td>July 10-12, 2018</td>
<td>Summer Horse Judging Camp, OSU Stillwater</td>
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The OSU Veterinary Medical Hospital has been serving horse owners since 1948. We offer routine appointments Monday-Friday and 24 hour emergency service including holidays. The equine medicine and surgery service is staffed by board certified specialists, post-graduate veterinary residents, and senior veterinary students. The service is supported by board certified specialists in other areas of the hospital including anesthesiology, ophthalmology, radiology, cardiology and pathology. Licensed animal health technicians specifically trained in equine internal medicine and surgery assist our veterinarians and provide patient care during the day and after hours.

All members of our team utilize state of the art diagnostic and therapeutic modalities with the common goal of delivering the highest possible standard of compassionate veterinary care to ill or injured horses, while training the equine practitioners and veterinary specialists of the future.

Members of our faculty have special interests in

- internal medicine
- neurology
- equine surgery
- ophthalmology
- sports medicine
- cardiology
- rehabilitation
- anesthesia and pain management
- radiology
- alternative medicine
- neonatology
- dentistry
- reproduction
- geriatric care

We can perform endoscopy exams on horses at work on the treadmill. We can perform CT of the head and limbs and nuclear scintigraphy. Our imaging techniques also include digital fluoroscopy and ultrasound of limbs and chest and abdomen. We utilize complementary medicine such as acupuncture along with other therapeutic modalities to manage pain and help athletes perform to their potential.

Veterinarians Committed to Excellence in Horse Health Care – CVHS Equine Specialists

Internal Medicine: Lyndi Gilliam, DVM, PhD, DACVIM; Todd Holbrook, DVM, DACVIM, DACVSMR
Surgery: Michael Schoonover, DVM, MS, DACVS, DACVSMR; Daniel J. Burba, DVM, DACVS; Megan Williams, DVM, DACVS
Reproduction: Reed Holyoak, DVM, PhD, DACT; Candace Lyman, DVM, DACT
Anesthesiology: Marjorie Gross, DVM, MS, DACVA; Kip Lemke, DVM, MS, DACVA
Ophthalmology: Margi Gilmour, DVM, DACVO; Emily Sharpe, DVM, DACVO
Cardiology: Ryan Baumwart, DVM, DACVIM (Cardiology)
Radiology: Mackenzie Hallman, DVM; Carrie Kuzma, DVM

OSU’s Veterinary Medical Hospital is open Monday through Friday for appointments between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. To make an appointment, call (405) 744-7000, select “1” for small animals and “2” for large animals.

If your pet or animal has a medical problem that requires a veterinary specialist (cardiologist, ophthalmologist, internist, etc.), please have your veterinarian call for a consultation or call for assistance making a referral appointment.

ANIMAL EMERGENCY!

- Call (405) 744-7000 BEFORE YOU COME!
  - Press 1 for Small Animal
  - Press 2 for Large Animal

After regular office hours and on holidays, emergencies are accepted 24/7/365. Your call, to the appropriate clinic before you arrive, will help expedite preparation for handling the case.