

## Prevention of Heat Stress in Horses

Malora Roberts, DVM  
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The scorching summer months are definitely upon us! Even with the high temperatures and humidity, many of us are taking our horses out for different types of physical activities including showing, summer camp, and trail riding. While it's great to enjoy all that the warmer months have to offer, it is important to keep a close eye on your horse to make sure he is getting enough water and is not getting overheated.

There are different levels and clinical signs of dehydration and heat stress and sometimes your horse may present symptoms in subtle ways. Some symptoms to watch for include:

- Lack of sweat in the heat or cold, clammy-feeling sweat
- Dry, pale mucous membranes (gums)
- Loss of skin elasticity (prolonged skin tenting)
- Rapid heart rate
- Increased respiratory rate
- Excessive nostril flaring
- Elevated rectal temperature
- Lethargy

If your horse starts to show any of these symptoms, bring him into a cool, shaded place. Offer him water both with and without electrolytes. Hose him down with cool (but not ice cold) water. Take a rectal temperature, and call your veterinarian if his temperature is over 101.5 F or if you are concerned.

Prevention is key! Know your horse's normal resting and working respiration and heart rates. Monitor your horse during physical activity and make sure that he is still handling the stress level well. Make sure to take frequent water breaks and take him into a shady or cool area if possible. Don't try to exercise him beyond his level of fitness. Just like people, if you haven't trained to run a 5K and try to run one you can overexert and hurt yourself. Encourage increased water intake between times of exercise by adding electrolytes to food, feeding soaked hay cubes, or utilizing products like Purina's Hydration Hay. (Remember, any changes to your horse's diet should be done gradually.) Keep air circulating through your barn by setting fans to blow down one direction in your aisle rather than having two fans facing each other. Also take care not to have fans mounted to blow hot air down from the rafters.

Summer activities can be a great deal of fun and beneficial for you and your horse as long as you are prepared.