

PREVENTING TREATMENT: WHAT RIDERS CAN DO

At a distance ride, no one knows your horse better than you do, so be sensitive to potential warning signs

Pre-ride

~ Maintain the horses on a regular de-worming program. The stress of distance riding can reveal underlying parasite damage.

~ Know your horse. As part of training and conditioning, do your own "vet check exams" so you know your horse and your horse knows the routine. End workouts with a quick vet check including trot out, check for dehydration, pulse, etc. The best riders learn ADR- Ain't Doin' Right - a very important parameter although difficult to define. Monitor horse's weight; the horse should be neither too heavy nor too lean. Keep a log book.

~ Do a mini-vet exam. Check temperature; trot out before leaving home and after arriving at the ride site.

~ Bring the horse into the ride well hydrated. This may entail electrolyting to encourage drinking upon arrival at a ride site, feeding slurries, or even bringing water for finicky drinkers. For horses accustomed to grass, hand grazing on grass is excellent.

~ Trailering is stressful; water regularly. Let the horse properly recover from trailering. As a guideline, horses trailered more than 3 hours should be given at least 12 hours to recover. Those trailered more than 5 hours need a full day. Also, horses need gentle exercise to loosen up muscles after trailering .

~ Minimize feed changes as much as possible. Make sure the horse has plenty of forage.

~ Watch EDPP-MF: Eating, Drinking, Peeing, Pooping, and Moving Freely. Know and observe your horse.

~ Plan your ride carefully. Plan a ride time based on past ride times, weather, trail conditions and the state of conditioning of your horse. Ride to your plan, not to what other horses are doing.

~ Electrolyte, starting well before the ride so horses will drink properly (at least the prior evening and in the morning before starting the ride)

~ Learn your horse's needs and adjust your ride according to what the horse tells you.

~ Maintain proper hoof care. Shoe properly for the ride to minimize chance of injury and minimize stress.

~ Select rides and ride strategy, i.e. how cautiously you ride, with a view to ride management, veterinarian controls, number of stops, distance between holds, etc.

Ride (Remember, the ride vets are there to help you and your horse!)

~ Watch EDPP-MF. If all is normal, fine. If not, slow down or stop.

~ Horses need to rehydrate, feed, and rest by about 15 miles. Horses rehydrating early do much better.

~ Monitor progressive pulse recovery during the vet check. The pulse should continue to drop during the hold period and be 8 to 20 beats lower than the criteria by departure time. If not, slow down or check with a vet. Watch weight loss during the ride.

~ If concerned on the trail about ADR ("Ain't Doing Right"), do a mini-vet exam and CRI (Cardiac Recovery Index) on the spot.

~ Watch out for over-excitement that can lead to early tie-ups, dehydration, etc. Much of the critical electrolyte and water loss in horses occurs in the first 10 to 20 miles. Warm your horse up thoroughly or wait a couple minutes after the start and use the first couple of miles as warm-up.

~ Be willing to let leaders go. Separate into a small group going at your pace.

~ Adjust for temperature and footing. Humidity, even if cool, necessitates slowing down as does heat. Mud, sandy footing, twisty single track, side hill, and even slippery grass require far more work as a horse cannot use its natural suspension system.

~ Give your horse every opportunity to drink. Wait at water stops; loosen the girth if necessary. Train your horse to drink.

~ Electrolyte regularly and often: as much as once per hour if it is hot, humid or the footing is difficult.

~ Ensure the horse is getting enough energy food for the pace of the ride.

~ Use a heart monitor and if readings are higher than expected for the terrain, etc., slow down.

~ Learn your horse's needs and adjust. If in doubt at the vet check, discuss with a vet your concerns.

~ Take it easy out and easy in: Start out slow from the vet check or warm up before leaving the vet check; slow down coming into the vet check. Abrupt changes are hard.

~ On cool/cold and wet/windy days cover your horse with rain sheets and/or blankets to prevent cramping or tying up at holds. Consider a rump rug.

~ Use body work such as Team work or message at holds.

~ Use the vet as your partner and friend. Discuss any concerns with them. They are there to help. The only stupid question is the question not asked.

Post-ride (these are steps to avoid treatment and do not include leg care, massage, etc.)

~ Watch EDPP-MF: Eating, Drinking, Peeing, Pooping, and Moving Freely. If all is normal, fine. If not, check with a vet.

~ Rehydrate through free access to water, offer slurries, etc.

~ Postpone concentrated feed for several hours, particularly if the horse's pulse stays up.

~ Monitor post-ride pulse recovery, dehydration, and gut sounds.

~ Blanket if necessary when the weather is cool; use rain sheets to keep dry if necessary.

~ If there is any question with hydration or colic, immediately consult a veterinarian. If the vet is not experienced with competitive distance horses, have them consult with an vet who is if possible. Do not hesitate to stomach tube or aggressively get hydration to normal through IV if necessary.

~ Do not trailer your horse home until your horse is adequately recovered and hydrated. Ideally, trailer home the next day so the horse has overnight to recover.

~ If at any time you have a concern or believe the horse may be ADR - Ain't Doin' Right, go see the vet for a quick check and/or discussion. The vet wants to see a healthy happy horse ready to go another day.