

The Importance of Understanding Resting Heart Rate

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The resting heart of your horse is an essential indicator of horse health. An elevated resting heart rate can indicate some type of stress from anxiety, illness, injury or over training and provides an early warning sign to a horse owner that something may not be quite right. An abnormally high equine resting heart rate might be cause for a more serious health concern and may prompt a call to your Veterinarian.

In humans, resting heart rate tends to decrease among more fit people. Current equine research generally supports the fact that the resting heart rate of a horse does not decrease after a period of training, nor does resting heart rate tend to change in older horses. This makes normal or elevated equine resting heart rate an even more predictable indicator of horse health.

Equine resting heart rate is usually taken first thing in the morning when your horse is awake, calm and relaxed, but before feeding or exercising. Resting heart rates are genetically determined, vary considerably from horse to horse and can range from as low as 25 beats per minute to as high as 40 beats per minute. Most horses fall in the range of 26-33 beats per minute and the resting heart rate will vary slightly day to day even if the horse is perfectly healthy.

To determine the resting heart rate for a specific horse you need to take the resting heart rate every day for 5 consecutive days. Then take the average of these five measurements.

Example: if a horse's resting heart rates were 27, 26, 28, 29, and 25 beats per minute on consecutive days then an average would be: $27 + 26 + 28 + 29 + 25 = 135$ divided by $5 = 27$. So your horse's average resting heart rate is 27 beats per minute.

Before taking these readings make sure your horse is in a healthy state, is injury free, has no abnormal environmental stimuli, and no strenuous exercise for the previous two days. Measurements should be taken under similar conditions every day. Remember that you need to compare "apples with apples" so creating a simple standard routine is essential.

Day to day fluctuations in a horse's resting heart rate of 2-3 beats is quite normal. A heart rate that is 4-10 beats out of the normal range is cause for concern but is often an indicator of nothing more than hard training the previous day, or anxiety, or unusual weather or outside temperature conditions. A resting heart rate of 10 beats outside of the normal range should prompt you to look for additional health warning signs for which you may want to call your Vet.

There are three main ways of measuring resting heart rate. A manual heart rate can be taken by feeling a horse's pulse beat at a major artery, or a stethoscope can be used to hear the heart beat. Count the heart rate for 10 seconds and then multiply by six to get the average beats per minute. An easy to use measurement tool is a horse heart rate monitor. The horse heart rate monitor is pressed against the horses coat near the elbow and within 10 seconds an ECG accurate heart rate is displayed.

Resting heart rate is a key indicator of horse health and it takes less than a minute per day to get a reading. Keep a record of days when your horse has an elevated heart rate. You will soon become familiar with fluctuations in resting heart rate as an early warning sign for changes in horse health. If your horse has an abnormally elevated resting heart rate, you may want to contact your Veterinarian.

Horse Health Resting Heart Rate Tip:

- Check your horse's resting heart rate for 5 days to determine what is normal for your horse.
- Set up a daily routine of checking your horse's resting heart rate.
- If resting heart rate is 4-10 beats above normal there may or may not be a health concern.
- If resting heart rate is 10 beats above normal, check your horse for problems and contact your Vet if necessary.