

# First-time Horse Owner

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Congratulations on your new horse!** Horses are wonderful animals that require a lot of work and bring an enormous amount of enjoyment. Here are some of our recommendations to keep your horse healthy and how to care for him when he's not.

**DIET** – Because of their special digestive tract, horses require that the majority of their diet be made up of grass hay or fresh grass. Depending on the work your horse is doing and his metabolism, you may choose to add grain. Several sources are available to help you determine your horse's physical condition. You should consult with your veterinarian about the ideal diet for your horse.

**WATER AND ELECTROLYTES** – Horses should have fresh water available at all times. In the winter, this may require carrying buckets out to the barn or breaking ice in troughs. It is also important to make sure that if horses are moved from pasture to pasture, water is available in all of them. Electrolytes levels are maintained by providing a trace mineral block. These are sometimes called salt blocks or salt licks. Make sure that your horse has one available at all times.

**VITAMINS AND SUPPLEMENTS** – Depending on your horse's age, breed, diet, and activity level, you may need to provide a vitamin/mineral mix supplement. You should consult with your veterinarian about this supplement. There are also a host of supplements touted to enhance your horse's health. Many of them are helpful, while others are not as effective. Make sure to do your research before purchasing.

**FARRIER** – Farriers maintain a horse's hooves. Most horses need to have their hooves trimmed every 6-8 weeks. They may also need shoes. This will depend on the work your horse is doing and the conformation of their hooves. Your farrier and veterinarian will be able help you decide that. Remember that if you have no feet, you have no horse!

**COGGINS TEST** – The Coggins Test detects equine infectious anemia (EIA), a deadly disease of horses transmitted by deer flies, horseflies, and mosquitoes. Though it is now rare, there is no treatment and positive horses are humanely euthanized to stop the spread. Tennessee state law requires that all horses be tested every 12 months. Some events and facilities may require more frequent testing, so call to check before going to a show, sale barn, trail ride, another state, etc.

**VACCINES** – Your horse will require biannual vaccines. Below they are divided into core and non-core vaccines. Core vaccines are given to all horses while non-core vaccines are administered based on risk. If your horse is previously unvaccinated or their immunization history is unknown, they may need an initial series.

- **Core Vaccines** – Given to all horses
  - » Rabies – *annual vaccine*
  - » Eastern and Western Equine Encephalomyelitis – *semi-annual vaccine, best given just prior to mosquito season*
  - » West Nile Virus – *annual vaccine, best given just prior to mosquito season*
  - » Tetanus – *annual to semi-annual vaccine, may also be given after a surgery or a laceration*
- **Non-Core Vaccines** – Given based on risk
  - » Potomac Horse Fever – *semi-annual to annual vaccine, given to horses housed near water*
  - » Strangles – *semi-annual to annual vaccine, given to young horses, brood mares, horses in large barns or those that travel*
  - » Botulism – *annual vaccine, given in certain regions*
  - » Equine Herpes Virus – *given mainly to brood mares to prevent abortion, may also be given to horses in contact with them*
  - » Equine Influenza – *semi-annual to annual vaccine given to horses that travel and in some barns where large numbers of horses are kept*

Each vaccination protocol must be individualized to the patient. Discussing your horse's history, uses and travel expectations with your veterinarian will allow you to best protect your horse.

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**DEWORMING** – Deworming is also a very important part of routine horse care. An effective deworming protocol is determined by taking serial fecal samples that measure parasite load and/or identify the types of parasites present, then your veterinarian will determine what products are best for your horse and how often to use them. These serial fecal samples also determine how well your current dewormers are working. Make sure that dewormers are stored in a climate-controlled environment as extreme heat and cold can inactivate them. It is also important to make sure that you have an accurate estimate of your horse's weight.

**DENTISTRY** – Horses' teeth grow throughout their life. If a horse does not grind his teeth down evenly, he may need to have his teeth ground down to the appropriate angles or floated. Your horse should have his teeth checked every 6-12 months. This is usually done when vaccines are administered.

**TRAILER** – In the event of an emergency, you may need to move your horse to a veterinary facility quickly. If you do not have your own trailer, it is very important that you find someone who would be willing to lend one to you or transport your horse in the event of an emergency. Keep their number near your horse and programmed in your phone.

**HORSE INSURANCE** – Even with most attentive care, horses are prone to accidents and disease. An insurance policy (i.e. Major Medical) can ease fears and alleviate some worries about finances in an emergency. Please recognize that these policies do not cover preventative care and usually work by reimbursing you for the medical bills. Having a devoted credit card can give you the ability to pay the medical bill if you do not have the cash on hand.

There are several insurance companies that specialize in covering horses. Most of them do require that you also purchase mortality insurance against the market value of the horse. We recommend purchasing the minimum amount of mortality insurance and increasing your premium of medical coverage.

**TACK AND SUPPLIES** – It is important to have supplies, such as brushes and blankets, that are individual to your horse. This can protect your horse from the spread of disease. It is also very important that you find an appropriate saddle. In addition to fitting your budget, it must fit your body and your horse's. Tack store employees and trainers can help you find a saddle that will keep you from injuring your horse's back.

Owning and working with horses is a truly rewarding experience. Maintaining a routine healthcare program is one way to get the most out of that experience.



## Recommended readings for new horse owners

American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP)  
Owner's Resources [www.aaep.org/info/owners](http://www.aaep.org/info/owners)

*Horses for Dummies* by Audrey Pavia and  
Janice Posnikoff, DVM

*For more information, contact your local veterinarian.*