



## ApHC Trail Rides

### COLIC-PREVENTION TIPS

Perhaps the most important need of the trail horse is proper hydration. Without adequate hydration, the horse can fail in performance, his life become threatened, or he can die. Water and the proper balance of electrolytes are absolutely necessary for muscle function, including that of the heart.

In my search for information on preventing colic, I found that dehydration is one of the major causes of colic! By preventing dehydration you're going in the right direction toward preventing colic.

Under casual circumstances, the horse usually takes care of himself, drinking in his pasture or paddock when he's thirsty. But when the horse is stressed, the natural tendency of taking care of himself changes. When traveling, the horse tends to refuse water when offered. At ride camp, he's excited and may refuse or forget to drink. On the trail, again he may be too excited to drink, dangerously unbalancing his system. He may suffer an electrolyte imbalance, or his inner core may become overheated. A horse that's hot to the touch but isn't sweating is in serious trouble.

**The seasoned, thoughtful and educated rider will *always* place the horse's needs before his own.**

The rider should make sure the horse learns to drink on training rides. If the horse is not a natural drinker, do some training rides with a veteran horse that *is* a good drinker; horses frequently learn by example. Do training rides that are long enough that the horse becomes thirsty enough to drink from creeks, ponds or other natural sources of water. If necessary, dismount and loosen the girth so the horse will relax and think about drinking.

Days before leaving for a ride, try several small doses of electrolytes so that the horse becomes accustomed to the taste and procedure. Electrolytes, being salty, stimulate the horse's urge to drink.

Upon arriving at the ride camp, make sure water is available at all times. Two methods of accustoming the horse to drink at the camp are: 1) Bring water from home or 2) Flavor water at home for a period of time before traveling, then continue to flavor the new water at the ride camp with the same substance. Suggested flavors include cider vinegar, soft drinks, flavored electrolytes or molasses.

**On the trail, the rule is to never pass up water!** When riding with someone else, both riders should be courteous enough to stay and allow each horse to drink rather than water one's horse then dash off down the trail leaving the remaining horse frantic because he's being left behind.



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## DEHYDRATION-PREVENTION TIPS

### Know Your Horse!

- ❖ Preventing dehydration and positively maintaining hydration is both an art and a science. These must be tailored to the individual equine. Follow the motto “drink early, drink often.”
- ❖ Finicky drinkers:
  - If your horse is finicky about water, try a little cider vinegar in the water at home so the horse becomes accustomed to the taste and smell. Then add a little cider vinegar to the water at the ride to disguise any strange smell or taste.

Measure hydration the same way vets do. Inspect these hydration factors before, during and after your ride each day.

- ❖ A horse’s hydration can be checked by looking at the mucous membranes, capillary refill time, jugular vein refill time and skin elasticity, and by listening to its gut sounds.
  - *The skin pinch* is one method of determining hydration. Simply pinch the horse’s skin with the thumb and forefinger over the point of the shoulder (not over the neck). In a fully hydrated horse, the skin will pop back immediately. As the horse becomes progressively more dehydrated, the skin will stay puckered up for progressively longer periods.
  - *A capillary refill test* is performed by applying thumb pressure to the gums, removing the thumb, then observing the time it takes for the blanched area to return to the same color as the surrounding membrane. This test indicates the heart’s ability to replenish its capillary system, and is a very important tool in assessing metabolic conditions.
  - *The mucous membranes* that are observable are those of the inner eyelids and gums. Pink, moist gums indicate proper blood perfusion in the tissue. Normal mucous membranes can vary in color from pale pink to yellowish. Abnormal variations include reddish injection, mottled appearance, brick red color, and shades of purple. Changes from the baseline are considered significant.
  - *The jugular vein refill time* is taken by briefly occluding the jugular vein and observing the time it takes to refill (typically about a second). Dehydration slows the time it takes for the vein to fill.
  - *Gut sounds* are heard in the flank and abdominal areas. These sounds are graded after listening to the upper and lower area of the flank on both sides.

Listen to these sounds with a stethoscope to train yourself. Gut sounds that are reduced from normal can be a sign of dehydration.



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## How do you make sure your horse arrives at the trail ride well hydrated and ready to go?

- ❖ Make sure your horse has unlimited access to fresh water and loose or block salt at home.
- ❖ Teach your horse to drink on the trail during training rides. You might want to train with a horse that will drink from standing water, streams and creeks.
- ❖ Keep the horse well hydrated during trailering. Many riders like to give a dose of electrolytes before leaving home to encourage the horse to drink the fresh water, which should be offered at least every three or four hours.
  - Many riders like to use a Pro-Biotic paste prior to and after trailering to keep the gut moving and prevent impaction, which can lead to colic.
- ❖ Several studies have demonstrated that trailering is stressful and dehydrating to the horse, particularly in hot weather. Horses can lose 4-6% of their body weight subsequent to long-distance transport.
- ❖ Once you arrive at the ride, check the horse's hydration level. Offer fresh water. Administer a dose of electrolytes and/or offer loose salt to create thirst.
- ❖ Try to arrive at the ride with plenty of time for recovery.

## TIPS TO PREVENT COLIC

- ❖ Introduce or change feeds gradually.
  - We strongly recommend that you plan to gradually increase the amount of Nutrena Horse Kwick complete pellet feed a few weeks prior to the ride.

Note that it takes about three weeks for an equine digestive system to develop the proper bacteria for a new feed.

- Always feed pelleted feed in **small** portions with a bucket of fresh water, over a period of time until the allotted portion is consumed. (Allow your horse to eat a little, drink a little, eat a little, drink a little, etc.)

**NEVER** feed the entire allotment of complete pelleted feed at one time.

**AND**

**NEVER** feed the complete pelleted feed without a bucket of fresh water.

- ❖ Provide clean, fresh drinking water with feed at all times.
- ❖ Keep your horse on a regular de-worming schedule to avoid parasite damage.



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- ❖ After or during heavy workouts, allow your horse to take frequent small sips of water.

You can estimate how much water your horse is drinking by counting the gulps. Get to know how many times he/she swallows while drinking a measured amount of water, i.e. a five-gallon bucket.

- ❖ Keep a regular feeding routine.
- ❖ Remember, horses have very small stomachs and need to eat frequent small meals.
- ❖ Have your horse's teeth checked by an equine dentist or veterinarian. Improperly ground food can cause impactions.