



## Over breathing – signs to look for

### Many horses these days breathe too much air

This can be in the form of deep, heavy breathing or rapid shallow breathing, and can even occur at normal respiration rates.

Unfortunately this over breathing' has a direct and damaging effect on the physiology which includes for example a **reduction** in oxygen availability (see brain scans) and changes in pH and ion concentrations that affect normal nerve and muscle functioning, among other things.

The horse's body is able to compensate for the damaging effects of over breathing to an extent, but if the over breathing is allowed to get worse then eventually the physiology can no longer cope and symptoms arise. These can be anything from a very wide range of symptoms depending on the horse's genetic make-up and living conditions.

In 50 years of research and practice, medical Professor Konstantin Buteyko., who developed the breath training technique for humans, found that chronic illness was always accompanied by over breathing.

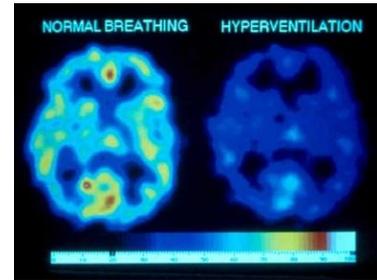
Horses with a chronic ailment such as hay fever, allergies, arthritis sweet itch or breathing (respiratory) problems; or a behavioural problem such as wind sucking, cribbing, separation anxiety or head shaking are likely to be over breathing.

Horses that have no obvious chronic symptoms may be over breathing but the breathing has not yet deteriorated to a point where symptoms arise.

Good breathing at rest is hardly perceptible by sight or sound.

It is easy to see if your horse is over breathing by looking at their nostrils when they are at rest. Horses that over breathe have round, open shaped nostrils which move with each in and out breath. You may even be able to hear the air going in and out. The rim of the nostril may be thickened.

Horses with normal breathing have narrow slit like nostrils which do not move with each breath so it is difficult to differentiate between the in and the out breath.



These brain scans show how quickly a change in the breathing affects the physiology. Within 2 minutes of voluntary over breathing the brain (right scan) has become depleted of oxygen by 40% !

Headshaking, nose rubbing and snorting are becoming more and more common



normal nostril



over breathing nostril

Horses that over breathe tend to get out of breath easily and take a long time to recover their breathing after exercise. Their breathing may even be described as heavy, hard, noisy, rapid, irregular or laboured.

Factors that encourage over breathing are common in lives of conventionally kept horses (see right). Over breathing is so common that it may be difficult to find a horse that has normal nostrils in order to see what they look like.

In addition to nostril shape and function there are other clues that indicate over breathing such as;

- difficulty concentrating or paying attention / constantly scanning the horizon and difficulty responding to communication
- easily agitated
- bargey behaviour / bad manners
- aggressive behaviour
- separation anxiety
- over sensitive to stimuli such as sudden noises or new objects
- dislikes being groomed and hypersensitive to being touched
- snorts excessively ie more than just occasionally, and when aroused eg before feeding or whilst being ridden
- yawns frequently
- runny eyes
- needs to urinate when being ridden
- over-weight possibly with crest development
- a regular high worm count
- digestive problems / underweight
- difficulty maintaining condition
- has difficulty recovering from injury (even insignificant cuts etc) or illness
- lethargic or oscillates between lethargy and hyperactive (adrenalised / agitated)
- gets tired easily
- difficulty maintaining fitness
- tendency to tying up after exertion
- hormonal imbalance (fails to come in season etc)
- failure to seasonally change coat, inappropriate coat
- drinks more than normal
- sweats more than normal
- skin problems
- exaggerated immune response eg to insect bites
- slow to heal minor injuries etc

Equine Breathing is a training method available to all, that helps the horse to improve their breathing.

Equine Breathing is largely a self-help method and anyone can try it using the [free instructions](#) for the simple technique of 1N (one nostril). Doing the 1N exercise for 30 minutes a day for a week enables owners to judge for themselves the effect on their own horse of improving the breathing.

Signs of over breathing in people is addressed in '*Horse Breather*' issue 5.

The contents of this ezine are not a substitute for veterinary advice. If the reader has any concerns they should seek independent professional advice from a vet.

## Causes of over breathing

Any kind of stress (physiological or psychological) causes an increase in adrenaline and adrenaline production is linked to increased breathing. So stress encourages over breathing. Stress has many forms which include

- traumatic events such as weaning;
- chronic situations such as lack of activity, unnatural feeding; clothing, shoeing
- occasional situations such as travelling and competitions; and
- seasonal triggers such as pollen, warmth, UV etc.

<http://www.equinebreathing.com/how-to-do-it.php>