



Horse Breather

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The chronic nature of over breathing

Just because a horse is not showing 'symptoms' it does not mean that s/he is not over breathing. Many people misunderstand the nature of over breathing and think that a horse is only over breathing at the time that the horse is showing 'symptoms', so valuable time is lost before using Equine Breathing to retrain the breathing. Some examples of the types of enquiries that I get illustrate this.

A common query is along the lines of:

"My horse snorts / breathes heavily /badly / noisily on or after exercise but is fine when at rest." Of course my view is that the horse is not fine at rest but is actually over breathing but it is only when the breathing is further increased due to exercise that the excessive breathing becomes blatant through noisy breathing, difficulties breathing, snorting, coughing etc and poor recovery and or poor performance.

Another common query is along the lines of:

"My horse develops breathing difficulties / problems / snorts if I ride him near oilseed rape / in a dusty manège". Again, I would say that this horse is already compromised by chronic and continuous over breathing the whole time but the problem is only observable to the owner when a particular trigger such as pollen or dust elicits an undesirable 'symptom' (eg head shaking, snorting, coughing etc) in the horse.

A common variation on this query is along the lines of;

"My horse has breathing difficulties / problems / snorts but only in the spring / summer – s/he has no problems the rest of the year."

The owner fails to understand that the horse has the breathing problem the entire year round, but it only shows up as symptoms such as hay fever, head shaking or sweet itch during the spring and summer when the horse responds to triggers such as pollen, sun light or midges.

If and when the horse stops over breathing these same triggers no longer initiate symptoms. So for example, once the breathing is returned to normal, it is not necessary to protect from midges a horse that formerly got sweet itch, or to keep the horse that reacted to oilseed rape away from fields of rape.

In all these scenarios the over breathing can and should be addressed as soon as possible rather than waiting for the 'symptoms' to show up. Often owners of horses with seasonal 'symptoms' such as sweet itch have not realised that it is important and probably better to do Equine Breathing during the winter when s/he is not exhibiting any symptoms. This gives the horse's physiology some time to improve before triggers arrive that upset the physiology.

The closer the horse is to normal breathing (and therefore normal physiology) by the time the triggers arrive, the less likely the triggers are to elicit the unwelcome response or 'symptom' and the more likely the response is to be moderated if it does occur.

Each animal is different according to where the trigger level is in terms of carbon dioxide levels. One horse may require carbon dioxide levels to be raised to near to normal in order for the trigger to fail to elicit the symptoms and another may need the carbon dioxide levels just raised a little for the trigger to fail to elicit a similar symptom.

Often over breathing in horses can be over looked by their owners because so many horses over breathe that many people are not familiar with normal (good) breathing.

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They do not realise that their horse is doing anything other than normal breathing. see *'Horse Breather'* 29 Does my horse over breathe for more details on how to recognise over breathing.

About snorting

Clearly, snorting is a normal response for a horse and is useful in clearing the nasal passages of debris and irritants as well as conveying emotions such as excitement or release of tension.

But snorting can become excessive and it is a common symptom associated with hay fever, head shaking and anxiety. Snorting is excessive when it is repetitive, frequent and more forceful (louder, longer and more violent) than normal occasional snorting. Excessive snorting I believe is due to over breathing which makes the nasal passage cells more irritable and mucous producing (see How it works page on the website). A horse that snorts excessively would benefit from Equine Breathing.

Excessive snorting is not only a sign that the horse is over breathing but each snort itself is further damaging to carbon dioxide levels and perpetuates a vicious circle. During snorts the length of the out breath is shortened and so the next in breath is taken in more quickly which increases the volume of air taken in to the lungs ie increases over breathing and further reduces carbon dioxide levels.

As the breathing starts to recover with Equine Breathing, this snorting disappears.

However, another kind of snorting occurs in horses that have started Equine Breathing. These snorts are the body's attempts to blow off 'extra' carbon dioxide. Now the aim of doing Equine Breathing is to increase carbon dioxide levels back up to normal so why would a horse blow off carbon dioxide in this way?

The reason is that when a horse chronically over breathes the physiology has to initiate some serious compensatory mechanisms to overcome the potentially fatal effects of low of carbon dioxide. These mechanisms are slow to turn on and turn off (taking a matter of days), but keep the body at an equilibrium that, although not ideal, at least avoids fatal damage.

When carbon dioxide levels start to recover (increase) through Equine Breathing the body suddenly finds itself out of equilibrium. The compensation mechanisms are slow to turn off so the quickest way to get back to equilibrium, albeit an unhealthy one, is to blow off the extra carbon dioxide.

Gradually as the Equine Breathing continues to encourage higher carbon dioxide levels over time, the compensatory mechanisms are turned off and the physiology is then open to returning to a more normal state. The level of snorting therefore gradually decreases as the Equine Breathing program progresses.

Another reason for snorting at the start of Equine Breathing is tickling in tissues of the airways and nostrils that have been chronically compromised by lack of circulation as they experience an increase in oxygen and nutrients due to improved circulation. Similarly, people often experience tickling in nose or throat when they start reducing their breathing.

I am always interested to hear your views and experience so do email.
Till next time
breathe easy
Clare

clare@equinebreathing.com