



Horse Breather

Equine Breathing ezine September 2016 issue 67



www.equinebreathing.com

Best start for horses that find 1N difficult at first

[free instructions for 1N](#)

There are two factors that can contribute to a horse finding it difficult to start 1N. One is psychological, the other physiological. A horse may be affected by one or the other, or a mixture of both.

Psychological

There are some horses that actually find relaxation difficult. Just like there are some people that want to be on the go all the time and get fidgety or bored if they have 'nothing to do'. Horses are quick to recognise that 1N is inherently very relaxing and so if they are anxious about letting go they try and avoid the 1N.

Such a horse may refuse to allow any 1N at all, or they may happily do 1N for several minutes but then just as they become drowsy, they start to fidget or resist. Or they may do a whole session very happily but then the following session they fidget or resist.

If your horse shows any of the following behaviours, they may need some extra help before starting 1N

- Fidget rather than being calm
- Explore and mouthe or bite new objects or any objects in the vicinity
- Often stare into the distance as if looking for threats
- Spookiness, over reactive to new stimuli, sights and sounds
- Whinnies or neighs when owner arrives and or leaves
- Constantly follow the owner with their eyes and get anxious if the owner goes out of sight
- Lag behind when led or rush on ahead rather than staying in position on a loose lead rope
- Require lots of attention
- Regularly invade the owner's personal space, nudging them for titbits, walking across them, turning the haunches toward them, nippiness etc
- Have difficulty staying focussed in training situations, poor attention span
- Ignore owner's requests and or a slow or erratic response to requests



What to do

Respond / Reward or Control of Movement exercises

These simple exercises are surprisingly effective in enabling the horse to let go and relax so that they can fully enjoy the 1N.

Control of movement exercises consist of asking the horse for a movement using body language and or pressure on the lead rope. The instant the horse responds the pressure is released and there follows a rest of at least 5 or 10 seconds. This is repeated several times until the horse synchronises in the movement, and moves as one with the handler with no need for the lead rope. Then they relax fully in the rests.

They can be done at liberty or on a halter.

They can be done using positive reinforcement so long as the horse is not aroused by food rewards. Getting excited about the idea of a food reward would of course be counterproductive to gaining relaxation.

For our purposes of building relaxation it's just the first response by the horse to move that we're interested in. So just one step or even a shift of weight can be sufficient. We don't need the horse to spend time in the new gait/direction. Therefore the control of movement exercises can be done in a confined space, even in a stable or stall.

So it's

Request

Release

Rest for at least 5 to 10 seconds

Repeat until horse synchronises instantly in the movement and relaxes in the rest

The movement can be anything from your regular handling and or training.

The exercises can be very simple for example

- One step forward or backwards or to the side
- Head down.

A good test to see if your horse is fully synchronising with you is to stand facing the horse's neck and then step towards the neck. You can try doing this with the intention of continuing to walk when you reach your horse's neck and if synchronised with you then they will turn and shift their shoulders to accompany you. Or you can do it with the intention of stopping at their neck, in which case they won't move.

Response / Reward / Relax control of movement exercises are a good place to start if your horse is having difficulties starting 1N, whether that difficulty is psychological or physiological or a mix.

It's also a good idea to return to the control of movement exercises if your horse becomes fidgety during 1N.

Physiological

Physiological factors include things like tickling or strange sensations due to the improvements in the physiology resulting from reducing the over breathing. Humans can feel a bit sick, get tickles or cough or giggle etc.

Physiological changes can occur almost immediately when the breathing starts to be improved and even though 1N is a very mild form of training, sensitive horses or horses with bad over breathing may need to start with less at first.



What to do

Use 'soft start' 1N [watch video](#)

If your horse is sensitive or conditions are very hot, you may need to start 1N gently with one of these two 'Soft Start' 1N techniques.

1. Partial 1N

This is the simplest 'Soft Start' to do. You just leave a gap when you cover the nostril. If the horse has had difficulty with normal 1N, try covering only half the nostril until the horse is fully relaxed. After a couple of minutes then gradually cover a bit more of the nostril, but only if the horse remains relaxed. If the horse starts to fidget return to the half nostril for a while before gradually reducing the gap once more.

block the out
breath only



2. 'Out only' 1N

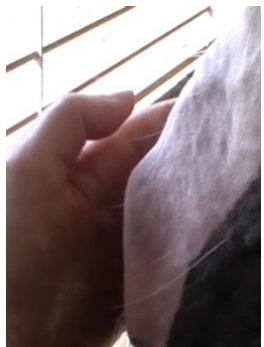
This second technique requires a bit more coordination. You have to watch and listen to the horse's breathing to identify the in and out breaths, and then cover the nostril completely but **ONLY FOR THE OUT BREATH.**

Open your hand away to release the nostril completely for the in breath.

The horse's breathing may be quite variable to begin with but try to follow their pattern and try not to block the in breath at all.

If possible continue to block the out breath through any irregularities of the breathing and even through snorts. This is not always easy!

release for
the in breath



At some point his/her breathing will become more rhythmic and less strong and then s/he will relax nicely. Once s/he has achieved this better state for a couple of minutes you can start to keep your hand over the nostril for the start of the in breath. When s/he remains relaxed through this then you can gradually work towards keeping the nostril fully covered through the in breath as well as the out – in other words, regular 1N. But if s/he finds it difficult at any time, return to covering the out breath only.

These soft start methods are likely to be ineffective if the horse's difficulty with 1N involves worry about relaxing. This is partly why it's usually best to do Respond / Reward / Relax exercises first, and then try regular 1N which tends to be more effective more quickly than soft start 1N. Only turn to Soft Start if after good control of movement exercises the horse is still finding 1N difficult.

Other tips

Walking the horse between attempts at 1N or soft start 1N can help a horse to relax. It stimulates metabolism which can help relieve strange sensations and just the act of walking can be calming. Combining the walking with Control of Movement exercises makes the walking even more effective.

Hot conditions make it harder for a horse to reduce their over breathing. This is because horses use increased breathing to cool themselves. Ideally it's best to start 1N in cool or moderate conditions but if this is not practical then wet the horse or use a fan to cool them. and if necessary use the soft start 1N

Use of glove or towel. If you have a big horse with large nostrils, and your hands are not big enough to adequately cover them, you can use a glove or a towel.

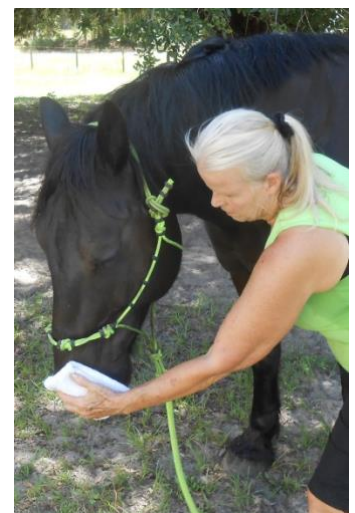
partial 1N



[watch video](#)



Denise LaCroix with her 17.2h
Percheron x Quarterhorse,
Titan





And as described in the 1N instructions, for your first attempts at 1N make sure the horse is in conditions that are most relaxing for them, eg with their friends, quiet surroundings, and with relief from fly worry or any other irritation and so on.

You may like to do some relaxing bodywork such as [Jim Masterson's TMJ release](#)

So to summarise, the best place to start is with the Respond / Reward / Relax control of movement exercises and if necessary go on to use the soft start techniques too. The aim is relaxation so let your horse be your guide and progress through the soft start 1N techniques at your horse's preferred rate until s/he is able to fully enjoy and benefit from regular 1N.

[If you have any questions please ask](#)

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.