



## **Care of Ponies and Miniature Horses**

Ponies and miniature horses may be smaller in stature and easier to handle, but they often require more diligent care to keep healthy. The following are some helpful hints on how to keep these fun critters doing well and living a long, healthy life.

- 1) Minis are very prone to developing laminitis/founder. Laminitis is an acute, painful foot condition that can lead to a more chronic condition called founder. Ponies that have “foundered” tend to have feet that grow abnormally fast and long, and sometimes have a dished appearance. Some severe cases of laminitis can result in euthanasia. Things you can do to help prevent laminitis/founder include: maintaining your pony at an ideal body weight, avoiding rich foods such as grains and lush grass, having feet trimmed at least every 4 to 8 weeks (or as advised by your farrier).
- 2) Similar to full sized horses, it is recommended to have the mouth checked as a foal and a dental done every one to two years thereafter. Dentals are important to file down sharp points, to balance the mouth, and ensure good occlusion. Due to their shorter stature, it is easier for ponies and minis to get kicked in the head if they are housed with full sized horses. Therefore, fractured teeth can be a common finding in minis. They also require extra dental care due to overcrowding of teeth in their small jaws.
- 3) Minis are prone to developing small intestinal blockages. Therefore, it is especially important to make sure they have water available at all times and that they have regular dentals to ensure they are able to chew their food adequately.
- 4) Minis need exercise just like large horses do. However, you will likely run into trouble if you have them out on pasture all summer. They tend to gain weight easily on grass, and they tend to founder when on lush grass. Sometimes it is better to put them on a pasture that has already been grazed (the grass is already short), or use a grazing muzzle to help control food intake. Grazing muzzles typically attach to the halter and allow the mini to eat only a few pieces of grass at a time.

- 5) Keeping minis with full-sized horses is often not ideal because of the risk of injury and the difference in nutrition planes. Minis can sometimes be at the top of the pecking order, however, a full sized horse can easily injure or even kill a mini if they want to. Use caution when mixing these different sized horses together. Another thing to consider is that minis usually need to have their food intake regulated, where as full sized horses often do best with food available at all times. It can be difficult to accomplish this especially in the winter when a grazing muzzle is not advised.
- 6) Minis often require additional fencing because they are experts at slipping under the fence or finding small openings in the fence to escape out of. Therefore, please ensure that the fence is low enough to keep your mini in. Sometimes, especially in the first week or two of getting to a new home, a mini will travel many miles away from home if they escape out of the fence.
- 7) Minis tend to have sensitive respiratory tracts. I would not recommend letting them stick their heads into large pieces of hay (ie round bales) for extended periods of time or keeping them in dusty areas (ie dusty dry lots, arenas, or stalls).
- 8) Other recommendations for all sizes of horses include: keep a mineral block and salt block available at all times, do not feed on the bare ground because your horse may accidentally ingest sand and rocks which could cause colic, a shelter needs to be available for your horse at all times so they can get out of the elements if needed, regular deworming, vaccinating, and check- ups should be done as advised by your veterinarian, fresh water (not ice or snow) should be available for your horses to drink at all times.
- 9) Please be diligent about monitoring your mini's body condition. You should be able to feel his/her ribs without having to push through a thick layer of fat. If the ribs are difficult to feel or you can't feel them at all, your mini is over weight. If you can see his/her ribs, spine, and/or hips, your mini is underweight (which is unusual). Obesity is extremely common in ponies, it can lead to number of serious health problems, and is easily prevented.