

*Winter is just around the corner! Here are some ideas to keep your horse healthy... and you happy, during the cold season.*

**Nutrition:** All average inactive horses need to consume about 2% of their ideal body weight in food each day. That's 20 pounds of hay a day for a 1000 lb. horse. On a cold day this amount can increase to 35 lbs. in order to maintain their body weight and stay warm. A mixed grass hay or 50:50 timothy/alfalfa hay is good. If you have an older horse with kidney problems, avoid alfalfa hay because of its increased calcium levels. Also, avoid daily bran mashes in these horses due to its high phosphorus levels that tend to stress the kidneys. Bran mash should only be fed once a week at most. Soaked beet pulp can be an extra source of fiber. Soak the beet pulp in warm water for 3 hours prior to feeding to prevent choking. When horses digest hay it provides the body with heat through the digestion process, grain does not do this. Geriatric horses should be fed separately to make sure they have adequate access to feed and water. These older horses should also be fed 4x a day (no more than 5 lbs. of feed each time). This will help keep their bodies producing heat throughout the day. Older horses with bad teeth can benefit from soaked hay cubes. All horses should have their teeth checked yearly and all points and corrections made. It is our goal to slow aging and address problems as they arise.

**Water:** Due to cold temperatures, frozen water buckets, and dental issues, most horses don't drink enough water and can become at risk for impaction colic. Offer warm water at least 2x per day or buy a heated water bucket with a chew safe cord. These buckets need to be plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter outlet for safety reasons. Poor water intake can also cause dark urine. Snow is NOT a water source.

**Blanket or No Blanket:** Horses need 3 weeks to adjust to declining temperatures and grow a winter coat. Horses that are body clipped for shows and kept in barns less than 60 degrees can benefit from a blanket. Properly fed horses, in good body condition will grow a winter coat and usually don't need a blanket unless the temperature drops below zero or they are exposed to strong winds. During this temperature a water resistant blanket with 400 grams of insulation will be beneficial. Blankets need to fit properly, be clean to prevent fungal infections and should be removed weekly to check body condition and for skin sores.

**Housing:** A three-sided shed is sufficient in the winter months. It will provide shelter; fresh air and the horse can go in and out. Arthritic horses should not be locked in a stall for long hours. Legs can swell, stiffness sets in and they are at risk of going down. Exercise keeps these horses limber and will maintain the required muscle to support their body. Muddy pastures and doorways can also lead to leg infections. If you notice sores or scabs on the horses lower legs they need veterinary attention and tetanus prophylaxis.

**De-worming:** Following the first hard frost all horses should be de-wormed for tapeworms and bots. Check the label on the product you are using for proper dosage and parasite coverage. Be sure to get an accurate weight of your horse using a weight tape. It is a good idea to have your horses manure checked for internal parasite eggs. Bring a small fresh (not frozen) fecal ball (not the pile) in a zip lock bag to the clinic and we can send this to the lab for analysis. Results are usually back within 48 hours. Parasites will affect the horse's ability to absorb nutrients and puts them at risk for weight loss and poor heat regulation.

**Walking:** Ice can be very dangerous. If your horse must be shod through the winter, ask the farrier to apply borium. Fresh manure sprinkled over icy patches will freeze down and prevent falls.

**Rabies:** It is important that your horse be rabies vaccinated as wildlife may enter the barn in search of food and shelter during the winter. Equine rabies vaccines are required every year.

*The doctors here at Herkimer Veterinary Associates are available to discuss your horse's health. If you have not had an annual exam, now is a great time. We would be glad to update vaccinations, discuss body condition, and evaluate teeth.*

Have a safe winter!

*Dr. James T. Hays*

*Dr. Harold Fischer*

*Dr. Brenda Armstrong*