

Horse&Rider MONTHLY

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In this issue...

WARM UP
TO **WINTER**
RIDING

VENT
IT OUT
SEASONAL
HORSE
HEALTH

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Horse Life



TRAIN / HEALTH

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Warm Up To Winter Riding

Ride through winter in comfort with a few simple tips for staying warm.

If you live in a cold-weather climate, you know how challenging riding through winter can be. Here are a few tips for taking the chill off barn and riding time.

1. Wear Layers.

Before you head out to the barn, know whether you're just going out to feed and check on the horses, or if you'll be riding. If you're not doing strenuous barn chores or schooling your horse, wear heavier clothes. And, if you are going to be getting your heart rate up and working hard, dress in layers.

Wear a lightweight base layer that'll wick sweat away from your skin (polypropylene or silk are two options) then follow that with a middle layer of wool, or a synthetic that insulates without adding a lot of bulk. A jacket system that has a zip-in vest or jacket offers even more options.

2. Pack Smart.

If you'll be trail riding, pack a small waterproof container or ziplock bag that has matches, an extra layer of warmth, and a "space blanket." Boating supply companies offer small kits that are waterproof and crushproof, and can usually be slipped into a saddlebag or fanny pack.

3. Grooming Time.

A good grooming session before you ride will warm you up and will help warm your horse's muscles, too. During your grooming routine, check your horse's hooves for snow or ice if he's been outdoors. Pick out his feet, then spritz with cooking spray or coat with Vaseline to keep snow and ice from packing into his feet. While you groom your horse, wear your horse's bridle under your jacket to help warm the bit, or wrap it in gel hand warmers. Or, check out The Bitten Store's bit warmer, which'll double as a body warmer or can slip into your pocket as a hand warmer.

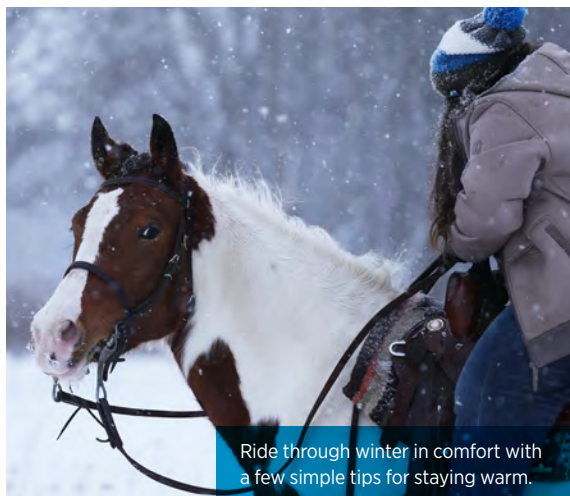
6. Cool Off.

Plan extra time to cool your horse down after a ride. If your horse is clipped, consider using a quarter sheet—it'll drape over his hindquarters and keep him a little warmer during cold-day rides.

7. Dress For The Ride

If you wear insulated boots, make sure you're able to move them easily in the stirrups. Consider ordering oversized stirrups for use during the winter months. Try gel-pack foot warmers to protect against popsicle toes. Take time to stretch and warm your muscles before climbing into the saddle. And give your horse plenty of time to warm up before you start a strenuous schooling session.

★ It's Not Always The Easiest Time To Ride, But You Can Beat The Cold-Weather Blahs With Some Of These Tips And Strategies For Winter Riding.



Ride through winter in comfort with a few simple tips for staying warm.

PHOTO BY JULIABENDYK/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

9 Hydrate.

If you're going on a long ride, wear a Camelbak (drink delivery system that you wear like a backpack) or a similar product to carry water. It's easy to get dehydrated in the winter, and dehydration makes you more susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite. Water is a concern for your horse, too. Studies show that when they're offered warm water, horses will drink more in the winter than if their water is ice cold. Keep an eye on water tanks and buckets (make sure they're clean and ice-free). Decreased water intake can increase the risk for colic.

11. Take a Break.

On really cold days, take a riding break. Check-in on your horse, then grab your tack and head to a warm tack room, or your house, and do a little cold-day cleaning. Wash bits (Listerine makes a great bit cleaner and disinfectant), clean headstalls and saddles, and check for any worn leather or broken buckles.

12. Safety First.

Do a safety check. Walk through the barn and pasture, checking for ice and hazards. Mix sawdust and de-icer to both melt ice and absorb moisture, and double-check water lines when frigid temps are predicted.

13. Visualize Summer.

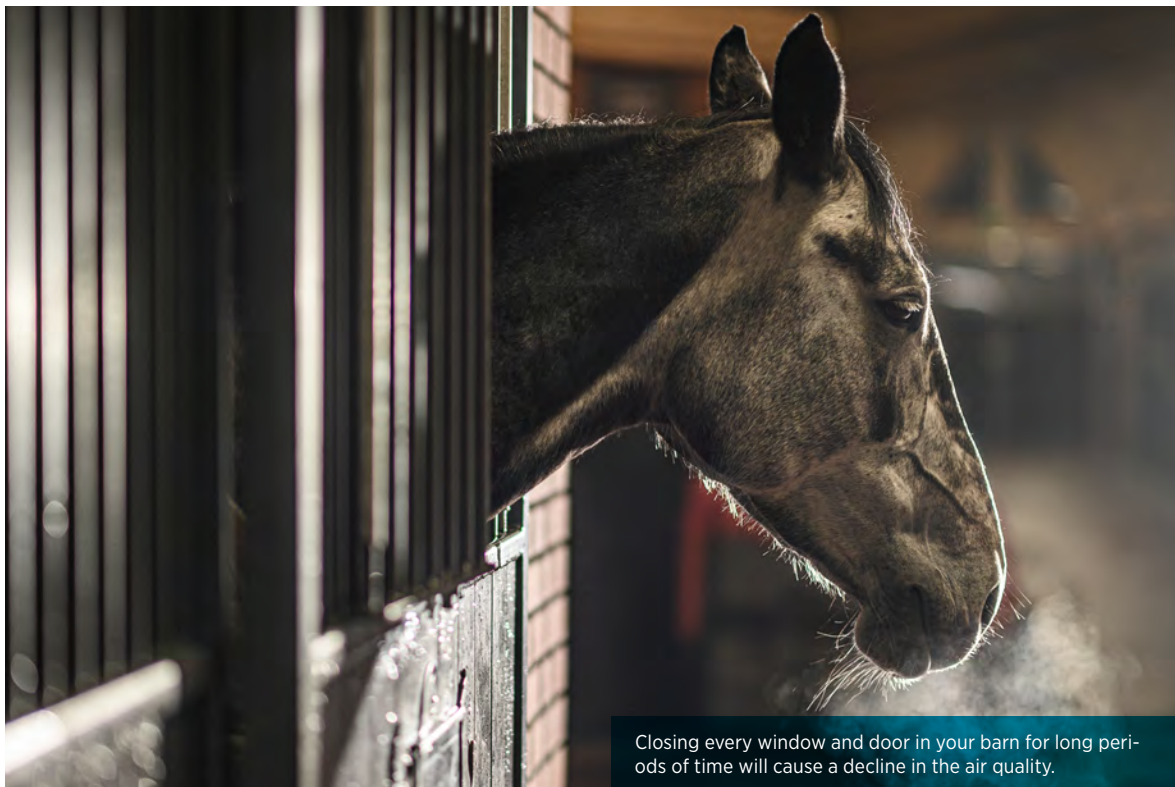
Sometimes, staying motivated requires goal setting. Think about goals for yourself and your horse, plan to attend some winter clinics and horse expos, and make a month-by-month list of what you'll do to make your goals come true.

14. Enjoy Your Horse.

Even if you only have time for a deep whiff of eau d'equine or you just sit and listen to barn noises for a while, it can help recharge your batteries for that next sparkling winter day, when winter riding is at its best. ★

Winter Barn Ventilation

★ It's Tempting To Keep Your Barn Bundled Up All Winter Long To Keep Your Horse Warm, But It's Important To Think About The Air Quality And Ventilation To Prevent Any Respiratory Problems From Occurring With Your Horse.



Closing every window and door in your barn for long periods of time will cause a decline in the air quality.

PHOTO BY TOMASZ ZAJDA/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Proper ventilation in your barn is crucial to your horse's respiratory health, especially during the winter months. With the cold and snowy days ahead, you're going to want to keep your horse bundled up in the barn as much as possible. Resist that urge.

When you close up every door and window in your barn to keep the cold air out, you're also keeping any fresh air out. This can cause a significant decline in the air quality because dust and other particles from around the barn will build up in the air. Poor air quality is especially dangerous to a horse that suffers from heaves, a chronic, non-infectious airway condition, but can cause issues to a perfectly healthy horse if kept in a poorly ventilated space for too long.

To make sure your barn is still getting enough ventilation during the winter, try to remember that the most important thing you are protecting your horse from is wind and rain. The cold air itself isn't what will make your horse uncomfortable since their bodies run hotter than ours do. Usually, a blanket provides enough warmth for a horse which doesn't put his respiratory health at risk.

So during the winter, keep track of the weather and adjust your barn accordingly. If it's a nice sunny day but the temperature is still low, leave your doors and windows open to let fresh air in. You can leave them open at night, too, if the weather is going to stay nice. If you're constantly letting your barn breathe when the weather is nice, it

isn't such a big deal when you have to close it up due to sideways rain or heavy winds.

A good rule of thumb to tell if you've kept your barn closed up for too long is if it becomes 10 degrees warmer inside than it is outside. You also might notice the air feels thicker and smells like ammonia.

It's also important to up your cleaning routine during the winter to help keep things fresh when the barn is closed up. Clean your stalls extra thoroughly, and make sure you remove any trace of urine. You should also be stripping your stalls more than usual and you can use lime as an older-elimination method. Try to remove the manure as soon as you're done cleaning stalls rather than letting the bucket or spreader sit in the barn for a few hours.

Do what you can to lower the dust levels in your barn and consider running fans when your horse is turned out to really get the air circulating. You can also go through your barn with a leaf blower to blow out any large amounts of dust after feeding or cleaning stalls. Turn your horse out whenever conditions allow so he can get fresh air, sunshine, and a little exercise.

Staying on top of your barn's ventilation during the winter might seem like a lot of extra work at the time, but in the end, it's the best way to prevent any serious respiratory problems from developing in your horse that could have long term consequences. ★




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HORSE HEALTH

by the **SEASON**

Winter, spring,
summer, or fall...
all you've got to do
is remember what
your horse needs
to stay healthy.
Our seasonal guide
will help you.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER PAULSON

Pumpkin-spiced lattes and cold, crisp mornings—we call it “sweater season.” Or what about sunbathing and splashing in the waves? Nothing beats “swimsuit season.” Then there’s that cringeworthy time of year taken up by balance sheets and meetings with your accountant. “Tax season” is nothing to look forward to.

In my world, I don’t think about the seasons in terms of fashion or finance. Instead I think “emergency!” That’s right. Instead of sweaters and swimsuits, veterinarians think of colic season, cut season, founder season, abscess season, or allergy season. It’s definitely true that different times of year bring different health-care challenges for your horse.

In this article, I’ll give you a rundown of the most common seasonal health concerns veterinarians see, along with tips to help you avoid them all year long. Then you can refer to my checklist for reminders to help you stay on top of your horse’s health-care needs.

Emergencies can happen at any time of year. Even so, as a veterinarian I know there are certain times of year when I should make sure my truck is stocked with extra bandage material, or that my hoof knives are especially sharp. Read on to learn about the top five health care seasons I’ve learned to expect in my equine practice.

COLIC SEASON

When: Colic occurs most frequently during cold winter months. Although colic can occur at any time of year, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are the holidays most likely to be interrupted by a colic emergency.

Why: Cold weather often means your horse has less time outside and a reduced or irregular work schedule. This decrease in exercise can cause his gastrointestinal tract to slow down and increase his risk for colic. It’s also common for your horse’s water consumption to decrease when temperatures drop, especially if it’s cold enough for



PHOTO BY JANIS TREMPER

Lush green grass seen in spring and early-fall months indicates Founder Season.

water buckets or troughs to freeze. Decreased hydration increases the risk for an impaction colic, or blockage of feed material in your horse’s intestines.

Prevent it: To decrease your horse’s winter-colic risk, make sure he gets plenty of exercise. If turnout in the pasture is limited because of frozen ground, be extra vigilant about a daily work session in the arena.

To ensure that your horse drinks enough, consider providing warm water at least once a day. For pastured horses, consider a tank heater. Studies have shown that providing warm water for your horse can increase his water consumption by as much as 40 percent—and reduce colic risk.

CUT SEASON

When: Spring rain and snow have passed, pastures are dry, and the sun is out. Late spring and summer tend to bring on lacerations.

Why: When it’s nice outside, chances are you can hardly wait to turn your horse out in the pasture or paddock—especially if he’s been cooped up inside for a long, cold winter. When he first goes outside to romp around, he’s likely to be a little more rambunctious than normal and more likely to get into mischief. Not only that, essential and hazardous fence or barn repairs might’ve been overlooked during winter months.

Prevent it: Before you even think about turning your horse out for the

first time, perform a thorough safety check of pastures and paddocks. Inspect areas around feeders, gates, and water troughs where horses are most likely to congregate. Perform all necessary repairs to remove any potential safety hazards. If your horse is of the high-energy variety and has been cooped up all winter long, consider turning him out for the first time after a work session, ideally during a quiet time of day when he's less likely to be wound up when you set him free. If you're really concerned, ask your vet about using a light sedative to minimize the risk of a first-turnout pasture injury.



PHOTO BY JANIS TREMPER

Beware of Cut Season, when horses are turned out for activity, but barns and paddocks haven't been checked for hazards.

FOUNDER SEASON

When: The birds are chirping, flowers are blooming, and pastures are turning green—really green. Founder episodes are most common in the spring. Fall months, after the first rains, can also see a rise in founder cases. →

CALENDAR ITEMS

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| JANUARY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Flag: Abscess season is upon us. |
| FEBRUARY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacuum barn to eliminate cobwebs and dust. |
| MARCH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Flag: Founder season begins. • Start feed-through fly-control supplements or other insect-control measures. • Consider a grazing muzzle if your horse lives in the pasture. • Replace shoes if your horse has been barefoot for the winter. |
| APRIL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Flag: Cuts are coming. • Schedule veterinarian visit for spring shots, fecal exams, and deworming. • Ask about sedation for spring turnout. • Make pasture/paddock repairs. |
| MAY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Flag: Allergies strike! • Schedule Coggins testing and travel papers for upcoming travel season. • Update your first-aid kit. |
| JUNE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure barn fans are in working order for upcoming hot weather. |
| JULY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure-wash barn and shelters to eliminate cobwebs and dust. |
| AUGUST | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace or repair footing in high-traffic areas of pastures and paddocks. |
| SEPTEMBER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check winter blankets and make necessary repairs. |
| OCTOBER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Flag: Founder season returns. • Schedule veterinarian for fall shots, fecal exams, and deworming. |
| NOVEMBER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Flag: Colic season strikes! • Pull shoes if your horse will be turned out for winter. • Install tank and bucket heaters for upcoming cold weather. |
| DECEMBER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform necessary trailer maintenance and repairs. |

Why: Fresh, green grass is loaded with carbohydrates and calories. If your horse is out getting fat on pasture when the grass turns green, there's a good chance the sudden surge of carbohydrates will cause a founder episode. Spring is the obvious time of year for your horse to founder, but don't overlook the risks of early fall, when pastures dry from summer sun begin to green up once again, and carbohydrate levels rise.

Prevent it: Pay close attention to your horse's weight and body condition—particularly if he has the characteristic body type of an insulin-resistant horse (a cresty neck or other areas of fat deposits, and a tendency to gain weight easily). If you have questions about your horse's founder risk, talk to your veterinarian about performing lab work to test for insulin and glucose levels that'll determine whether your horse is insulin-resistant. If the tests confirm he does have this metabolic condition, take extra care to watch his weight and avoid excessive exposure to green grass. Consider a grazing muzzle to limit grass consumption, especially during spring and fall months.

Even if your horse isn't insulin-resistant, be sure to gradually introduce him to the fresh, green grass, especially if he's been locked in for the winter. Start with a maximum of one hour of daily turnout, and gradually increase time over several weeks. Finally, even if you introduce your horse gradually to pasture, make sure he doesn't get too fat. Obesity will increase his founder risk even without an underlying metabolic abnormality.

ABSCESS SEASON

When: The ice/mud cycle when winter temperatures freeze and thaw leaves your pastures and loafing sheds alternately rock-hard and boggy. Temperatures swing from frozen during a blizzard to warm and ice-melting. As if the weather hasn't been enough of a drag, today your horse can hardly walk; he has an abscess.

Why: Frozen ground can bruise your horse's feet, and when the ground thaws, mud acts like a poultice to help abscesses develop. At my clinic, we predict at least "an abscess a day" in the weeks following icy-cold conditions.

Prevent it: If your horse gets daily turnout, it's best to keep him inside when ground is really frozen. If he lives outside full-time, he could fare slightly better with the icy ground than his barn-housed counterparts, but is still at risk for abscesses. No matter his work schedule, and whether he's barefoot or shod, maintain a regular trimming/shoeing schedule year-round to keep your horse's feet in the best condition. Also check and clean his feet daily. If his feet are especially sensitive, keeping him shod might lower his abscess risk. Consider a hoof supplement containing biotin to help keep his feet as healthy and strong as possible.

ALLERGY SEASON

When: Allergies most often strike in spring and summer and manifest either in the form of hives or breathing troubles.

Why: If your horse is allergic, chances are his body reacts to a long list of different allergens, or allergy-producing substances, including different types of dust, pollens, or insects. Allergic symptoms, such as hives, appear once the amount of allergens he's exposed to reaches a threshold level. In spring and summer, pollen counts soar, and dry conditions mean it's dusty everywhere. Your horse's allergy threshold is easily surpassed.

Prevent it: If you have an allergic horse, pay close attention to his environment. Minimize his exposure to potential allergens by keeping your barn clean—vacuum away dust and cobwebs at least several times each year. Turn your horse out during stall cleaning or barn-sweeping time, and consider soaking or sprinkling hay to minimize dust. ★

SHOW SEASON

It may not be an emergency, but preparing for show or travel season can be an important part of your horse's health-care plan. To be prepared for travel, make sure your truck and trailer are safe and in good working order. Pick a quiet time of year to schedule an appointment for essential trailer maintenance and repairs. And don't forget to organize a first-aid kit for your trailer so you'll be prepared when on the road.

When traveling to shows, trail rides, or other events, your horse will be exposed to many other horses. Schedule vaccinations to protect against infectious disease approximately 30 days prior to your first event.

Finally, don't be caught without your travel papers in order. Most states (and many events) require a current Coggins test (a test for equine infectious anemia) within 6 to 12 months. In addition, you'll need health papers to travel across state lines. Requirements vary depending on where you live and where you plan to go. Talk to your veterinarian at least a month before you intend to travel to devise a plan for properly timing travel papers throughout the upcoming season.



No matter the quality, all forage leaves gaps in nutrition which can cause decreased performance. GROSTRONG® Vitamins & Minerals fills in those gaps. The combination of vitamins and minerals in GROSTRONG Vitamins & Minerals is exactly what your horses need to perform at their best in the arena, down the rail, or on the trail. Feed GROSTRONG Minerals, feed the best to your performance partner.



MAKE **WINTER** RIDING FUN



When snowy winter weather keeps you at home, it's time to get creative in your arena. Rather than riding in the same boring circle day after day, try these drills to mix up your routine, and keep things interesting and fun.

During the winter months, finding a good day to ride can be hard. You're constantly dealing with frigid temperatures, snow-covered outdoor arenas, and wind so cold that it takes your breath away. When you're stuck at home in your small indoor arena for months at a time, it can take the fun out of riding or even keep you from spending time in the saddle with your horse all together. But you don't have to let cold days keep you from enjoying your horse. Here I'm going to share a few things you can do on the ground and in the saddle to keep things exciting and help your horse avoid getting bored doing the same thing over and over.

Groundwork Respect

Groundwork is always beneficial to your horse and is something you can easily incorporate into your daily routine when you're stuck indoors. Before you even saddle up for the day, take a few minutes to test your skills on the ground with these three drills.

Learn to ground tie. Being able to ground is helpful for more than just the actual act of ground tying. It teaches your horse how to stand patiently and quietly, so whether you're trying to groom your horse, or even just throw his winter blanket on, he knows how to stand quietly.

When you first start, work in an enclosed area, like a round pen, so your horse can't get loose. Ask your horse to stand still and reinforce it by saying whoa. Next, take a step back and once again reinforce the standstill by saying whoa. If he tries to walk away, quietly gather your lead rope, ask him to stand, say whoa, and start over. If he's focused on what's happening elsewhere in the arena, you can slightly pull his head down to get his attention back on you.

If your horse listens to your cue and stands still, take another step back and test his responsiveness. Repeat this process as often as you need to until you can successfully step away from him and walk around him without him moving. This drill takes a lot of repetition, so don't feel like you have to master this drill in one day. Take time to build your horse's confidence and trust as you step away from him and ask him to stay still.

Move off your body. This is a technique you can use to help your horse better learn how to read your body language and respond to your cues. The best part is that you can do it just about anywhere you need to, whether that's a pasture, a barn aisle, or in the arena.

Start by leading your horse like you normally would, and then stop and stand still. Your horse should follow your body language and stop when you do. If he doesn't, that lets you know that he's not paying attention to what you're doing on the ground, or his focus is elsewhere. →



1



2



3

1. If your horse isn't paying attention, remind him to focus on you by gently pulling his head down and saying whoa.
2. Use your body language, and a whip if needed, to encourage your horse to stay a safe distance away from you on the longe line.
3. The red cones make up the outside of my circle. I will jog between them toward the middle blue cone.



Once he stops, stand there for a minute, and then walk off again. Take 10 steps before asking him to stop once again. If he continues to walk right past you, immediately back him up a few steps, and then stop and stand. The goal is to bring his focus back on you, and what your body language is saying.

This can also be a great tool to use if your horse tries to drag you out to the pasture. Make him understand who's in charge when you're leading him (hint: it's you!).

Longe with purpose. Longeing is a great way to warm up your horse's muscles before you get on to ride. When you longe with the purpose, you're teaching your horse to respect your personal space and move off your body even if you aren't directly next to him. This also helps your horse learn that he can't just speed up or change directions without your approval.

When you start out, choose the direction you want to go and ask him to move away from you so that he's on the outside of the circle and you don't have any slack in your longe line (as that can be a safety hazard if your horse gets tangled up in it). The goal is for you to be actively pushing him toward the outside of your longe circle by using your body to guide him. To achieve this, you might need some reinforcement. A whip or flag can be a great extension to your arm and help him realize there's a barrier between him and you that he shouldn't cross. Think of the area between your whip or flag as a wall that he shouldn't cross without you opening the door and giving him permission.

Hold your whip or flag slightly behind your horse's hip to open the door for him to go forward. If your horse tries to fall to the inside of your circle and get closer to you, use your whip to create space and have him move away from you while still going forward.

When it's time to change directions, move your body to your horse's head to close the door and stop forward motion. Then use your whip, once again as an extension of your arm, to push him in the opposite direction.

Set Up Small Obstacles

When you're limited on where you can take your horse to ride or practice, you might also be limited in the obstacles you have to use. These next few exercises can be done with things you most likely have sitting around the barn.

Navigate the circle. No matter what kind of riding you do, whether it be trail riding, showing, or ranch work, you'll most likely be put in a situation where you need to steer in tight spaces. This drill is simple to set up and only requires six cones (if you don't have cones, you can substitute fly spray or water bottles). Put five cones out in a circle, about the size of a longeing circle, with one in the center. Now the work begins.

Start on the outside of your cones and enter the circle between any two of your cones, going straight toward the center. Once you get to the center cone, pick an outside cone to go back to before steering your horse around to enter the circle again.

1. Because I chose a cone at the top of my circle, I hardly have to turn to aim toward my next destination. If I would have chosen a cone toward where I started from, I would have needed to make a very sharp turn to go back the direction I came from.
2. Now that I am in between two cones, I'm going to continue backing toward the second cone while paying attention to where my horse's feet are placed.

With this drill you can decide if you want to do a sharp U-turn around the center cone or if you want to make a wider turn toward a different part of the circle.

It's important to keep your eyes up when you're doing this drill, so you can better plan where you need to go.

Change this drill up every time you do it by including different gait transitions in between cones. For example, you can jog into the middle of your circle, but once you make the turn, extend trot out of it. The next time you can break to a walk, or up the degree of difficulty by doing this at the lope.

Back through cones. Having control when you ask your horse to back is an extremely important skill set to have, and can keep you out of trouble if you're out on a trail ride. All you need are a couple of cones and a small area that you can navigate through.

Start by setting up three cones in a straight line with approximately 6 feet between each cone. If your horse is especially green at backing up, you can space them even farther apart to begin with.

Position your horse with his hind end about 3 feet from the first cone in



your line on your right side. As you back, you'll want to guide your horse's hind end through the center of the two cones and then straighten him back out once the cone is on your left-hand side. You'll repeat this process, but this time moving your horse back to the left until the cone is back to being on your right-hand side.

There's no need to rush this exercise. Take it one step at a time and evaluate where your horse's legs are in the process. If his feet start to get too close to the cones, you can reposition his hips before taking another step.

Once you're comfortable backing through cones, you can move them in a foot or two and try again.

Work on You

If you're stuck indoors, now is the perfect time to focus on your riding position by working on your core strength and balance. You can do these drills at the beginning of your ride while you're warming up your horse, or you can incorporate them throughout your riding routine. Learn your body's limits and gradually build up to doing these three drills for longer periods of time; building strength and balance takes time in the saddle.

Stand in your stirrups. Standing in your stirrups is a great way to test your balance, and helps you adjust your legs so they're underneath of you and in an athletic riding position. If your leg is too

far back, you'll fall forward when you stand up. And if it's too far forward, you'll likely fall backward.

Start by standing up and out of your saddle about 2 inches while your horse is at a standstill. Take time to assess where your legs are in comparison to the rest of your body and reposition them so that they're underneath you. Once your legs are in the correct spot, engage your core muscles and use your thighs to keep you in position.

Once you can stay balanced in the saddle at a standstill, try standing in your stirrups at a walk or trot. To increase the difficulty, you can then drop your stirrups and see how well you do "standing up" without them.

Drop your stirrups. Kick your feet out of your stirrups and test out your balance when you're stirrupless. Once your feet are out of your stirrups, focus on keeping them in the correct position with your legs underneath you, so that your heel lines up with your hip and shoulder. Also remember to keep your heels down.

Start by walking a circle, and then gradually build up to the trot. If you find yourself sliding around at the trot, your horse is going to try and do anything he can to get you back underneath him, so go back to the walk and get centered before trying the trot again.

1. Here, you can see I am balanced because I am able to stay in this position without falling forward or backward. My legs are under my hips to put me in the most athletic riding position possible.

2. Moving my hand to the middle of my back causes me to become centered in my saddle and opens my chest to prevent me from falling forward.

When you can master riding without stirrups at a sitting trot, try your hand at posting without your stirrups to continue building up your leg and core strength.

Find your balance. This third drill is one of my favorites and will help you better find balance in the saddle. When you aren't centered in the saddle, you're more likely to lean forward and hunch your shoulders toward the front of your saddle. This throws your body's equilibrium off, and chances are, if you're not sitting centered in the saddle, your horse is going to wiggle around trying to get you back underneath him.

When you're in the saddle, place your hand behind your back with your palm facing outward. This opens up your chest and aligns your body in a way that keeps you straight and balanced in the saddle. Once you feel comfortable standing still with your arm in this position, try it at the walk, then the trot, and eventually a lope. Make sure you're switching arms regularly, so you are building the strength equally on both sides of your body. ★