

## Is Work Making your Horse Sore?

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Sports injury is not always an instant obvious problem. Horses may show no obvious lameness or swelling at the time of injury, nor may you see a change in attitude. However as time goes by you slowly notice changes in exercise tolerance, gait or attitude and do not know why. It is at this time many people call for help from such practitioners as Vets and Tactile Therapists. In many cases you can avoid the need to travel this path through careful observation of your horse and a routine measurement of vital signs.

### *Feel your horses' entire body regularly:*

To note variations in shape, texture, temperature and tension in your horses' body, you need to know the norm for your horse. So every day you see your horse, run your hands over the entire body, noting all variations from place to place. Making this a habit before and after work will allow you to pick up changes related to work such as heat and swelling. These areas may only be the size of a 50c coin, but with rest, identification and removal of the cause, they are likely to resolve. If left unnoticed, and continually assaulted, changes in gait and further problems may occur.

### *Take your horses temperature regularly:*

A rise in temperature may indicate a number of conditions including infection or sports injury. It can also help you assess the response of the horse to exercise. In a number of training stables in Europe, a rise of 0.5 degree gives the horse a day off! So get into the habit of taking your horses temperature regularly and recognise a change when it occurs.

Take your horses pulse regularly including before and after work, and if possible during work: The heart rate of the horse varies considerably at rest dependent on the surroundings, however if you take it regularly you will ascertain the norm for your horse. Following work the pulse reduces as the horse recovers. An extension in the normal rate of recovery indicates a reduced exercise tolerance and that it is time to investigate the source of the problem. Know how to assess saddle fit and re-check regularly as your horse changes shape: Pressure points from saddles will eventually affect performance and willingness to work. In your daily routine of feeling the horse, thoroughly investigate any changes along the back and compare these to the saddle. Addressing any issues will help to avoid changes in performance let alone reduce any pain for the horse. Locating and treating problems early is one of the major keys to success with injury management.

If the problem is small and managed correctly the likelihood to further problems is significantly reduced. Continual aggravation of small injuries can lead to significant pain and/or lameness. Such an ongoing problem often requires a large change in routine, costing valuable time in training and competing, plus the added costs of vets, tactile therapists, masseurs and other practitioners trying to locate and remove the issue.

A couple of minutes checking each day you ride is good insurance for yourself and your horse.

Enjoy finding pulses and taking temperatures.