



ANIMAL WELL-BEING

Horses

Author: Marisa Erasmus
Assistant Professor,
Department of
Animal Sciences,
Purdue University

Horses had a starring role in human history for millennia. Still do, in some places. But times change. Nowadays, most people never come in contact with horses, yet the animal's hold on our imagination continues. Simply put, the well-being of horses matters to many people, and the equine industry as well. This publication, part of a series, seeks to provide basic information for non-experts.

If you are concerned about an animal's well-being

- Call a local animal control officer
- For livestock and poultry concerns, contact the Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH)
<http://www.in.gov/boah/>

What is Animal Well-Being?

Animal well-being, or animal welfare, is the ability of an animal to cope with its environment and living conditions. It's more than simply being healthy. For horses, well-being includes:

- Feelings or emotions, such as contentment.
- An ability to perform natural behavior, such as grooming, stretching and turning around fully.
- Health and biological functioning, such as not having injuries or disease.

Did you know ...

- There are more than 680 breeds of horses.
- Horses spend 12 or more hours a day eating.
- Can horses sleep while standing? Yes. They sleep lying down, too.
- They'll see you coming: Horses have good vision, and their eyes can see almost all the way around (357 degrees!)

Signs of poor well-being

Horses that are sick may display some of the following behaviors or signs:

- Legs and spine are not straight
- Overly sensitive to sound and touch
- Less active than typical
- Fewer social interactions than typical
- Eating and drinking less than typical
- Grooming less than typical
- Dull, dirty appearance
- Difficulty walking
- Signs of swelling or injuries
- Higher or lower body temperature than normal, as well as sweating that is not from exercise
- Discharge from the eyes, nose or other areas
- Lowered head and tail for long periods

Horses that are in pain may:

- Stare and not move their eyes as much
- Hold ears back for longer than normal
- Have dilated nostrils
- Have unusual posture or lying position

Caring for horses

- Fresh, clean water is a must.
- Provide shelter that is dry and has adequate ventilation. The stall or box should be kept clean and dry; that can prevent hoof problems. Clean and trim hooves regularly.
- High-quality hay and grain should be available day and night, because horses eat early, late and often.
- To capture and handle a horse: Approach the horse's shoulder area. Do not make sudden movements. Remember, horses have nearly 360-degree vision.
- Clean and trim hooves regularly.
- Newborn foals should have regular, positive contact with humans to get used to being handled.

Watch out for ...

Crib biting (cribbing): Biting an object while contracting the neck muscles and pulling air into the throat. May be due to a lack of stimulation or not enough forage in the diet. Trying to stop this behavior from occurring is not recommended; using surgery or devices to stop the behavior may not be successful and does not treat the cause.

Weaving: Repeatedly swaying from side to side. Possible reasons include a lack of stimulation and social isolation.

Continuous scratching, scraping or head shaking: Again, a lack of stimulation is a possible cause, but nerve problems or parasites can also be to blame.

What to do about such behaviors? It is better to prevent the behavior from occurring in the first place by giving horses opportunities to exercise, social companions, more time on pasture, more roughage — and toys, too. For more information, see animal.ifas.ufl.edu/equine-extension/docs/2017_august_sec_newsletter.pdf