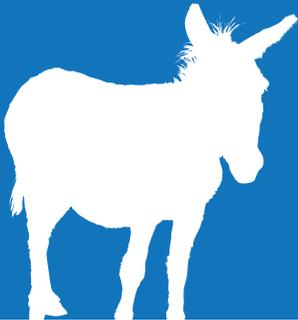




USPCA
ANIMALRESCUE



Caring for
Horses, Ponies & Donkeys

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Introduction

Caring for a horse can be a source of great enjoyment but is also a big responsibility.

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires you to ensure that any animal which you are responsible for enjoys the following 'Five Freedoms'...

- *Suitable accommodation in which to live.*
- *A healthy diet;*
- *The opportunity to behave normally;*
- *Be housed with appropriate company;*
- *Have protection from pain, suffering, injury or disease.*



The Duty of Care

Section 1: Environment

Shelter

Not all horses will need a stable. Some hardy breeds with thick coats are capable of living outdoors throughout the year, provided they can obtain shelter from the prevailing winds, summer sun and flies. However, horses of less hardy breeding, recently clipped, very young or elderly will require stable accommodation/housing or other shelter to protect them from the cold and damp or very hot weather. Any horse may need stabling at short notice should they become sick or injured and provision should be made for this in advance of an emergency arising.

Pasture

A good pasture management programme is necessary to avoid over-grazing, to aid worm control, to maintain good drainage and to control weeds. This includes, for example, picking up droppings, rotating grazing areas and where possible removing horses when the ground is very wet to prevent the pasture being broken into wet muddy patches. In muddy conditions it is important that a horse has an adequate, well-drained area in the pasture on which to stand and lie down, and on which to be fed and watered.

Housing

Welfare should be considered when constructing or altering buildings to provide housing for horses. The main considerations are safety and comfort, ease of access and good drainage and ventilation. If poorly designed or managed, stabling can contribute to the spread of disease, cause injury and pose fire risks. Any building used to house horses should be constructed soundly, with no exposed surfaces or projections likely to cause injury. All surfaces should be capable of being cleaned.

Suitable bedding material is necessary to provide warmth, protection against injury and to enable the horse to lie down in comfort. The bedding used should be changed or cleaned regularly.

Supervision

Horses kept outdoors should be inspected at least once a day. Stabled animals should be inspected at least twice a day. Particular attention should be paid to their gait, demeanour, feet, body condition and appetite so that early signs of disease, injury, illness or signs of parasites can be noticed and appropriate treatment promptly provided.

Hooves of horses should be picked out on a regular basis and at the same time examined for signs of discomfort, wounds, injury, loose shoes, impacted foreign material or anything else unusual. Horses should be groomed regularly to ensure that the coat is clean, free from wounds or parasites and to detect rug, tack or harness rubbing. The frequency required will depend on your horse's management regime and coat type.

Section 2: Diet

Feed

Horses are naturally grazers who eat little and often. Their natural diet is mainly grasses, which have high roughage content. Horses should be provided with a diet of grass, hay, or a hay replacement. Horses should be fed an appropriate diet that reflects their needs. It should be clean and free from soil, debris and poisonous plants, smell fresh and be free from mould and dust.

Good quality grazing may ensure an adequate intake of roughage and minerals. If grazing is inadequate, supplementary feeding may be required. Discuss this issue with your vet if you have any concerns.

The quantity of concentrates fed to a horse as supplementary feed should be no more than that necessary to provide the required energy for the exercise performed. The daily concentrate ration should be spread over at least two meals a day. Feed should be stored in vermin-proof containers to ensure the quality of feed is maintained. Feed containers and utensils should be kept clean to discourage rodents. Contaminated, mouldy or stale leftover food and forage should be removed daily. Each feed should be well mixed and freshly prepared.



A sudden change in appetite, or decrease in weight, can be a sign of ill-health and you should pay close attention to whether your horse is showing any other signs of illness. Your vet should be consulted if you have any concerns.

Inexperienced owners or keepers with any concerns about how best to feed their horse should seek expert opinion from a vet or equine nutritionist.

Water

It is essential that all horses have continuous access to a clean supply of fresh water. Natural water sources such as streams are not always satisfactory, as they may be contaminated, so an alternative supply may be required. Extra care should be taken during hot or icy weather to ensure the water supply is maintained and sufficient by regularly breaking the ice during cold spells or providing an additional water source during hot weather.

Water troughs or buckets should be securely fixed at a convenient height to allow, if necessary, horses of different sizes to drink comfortably and it should not be possible for horses to paw the water or dislodge the trough and knock it over. Water troughs should be constructed and positioned in such a way that minimises risk of injury. Water troughs and buckets should be checked regularly to ensure that water is available at all times.

Stabled horses should have continuous access to fresh water. Water providers must be constructed and positioned in such a way that minimises risk of injury. Automatic drinkers should be checked regularly to ensure they are working properly.

Water troughs and containers should be cleaned regularly to prevent the build up of algae and other debris. Any cleaning substance should not be toxic to horses.

Section 3: Behaviour

Exercise

Horses and ponies require freedom to exercise and this will require time and effort. Most stabled horses will benefit from daily turnout in the field to allow them to graze and socialise with other horses.

Training

Horses require calm, consistent and sympathetic handling by competent people. They respond best to a firm but gentle approach. If you are unsure how to best handle your horse, advice should be sought from an experienced horse professional

Section 4: Company

Socialisation

Horses are herd animals and prefer to live in social groups. Ideally they should be socialised with members of their own species but, where this is not possible, other animals may be used to provide company. They also enjoy human company so, if kept on their own, they require more frequent human contact and supervision. Donkeys have particular socialisation needs and can become ill if separated from a companion.

When living in groups, horses will develop a pecking order. It is important to be aware of bullying and care needs to be taken to ensure that all the horses are getting the feed and water they require. Individuals in larger groups are likely to encounter more competition for food, water, shelter and social position. Measures should be taken to identify individuals that are not coping well and to provide for those with higher maintenance needs.

Aggressive individuals may not be suitable for mixing in fields or communal barns and should be separated.



Mares heavily in foal or with foal at foot may need to be separated from other horses. Care should be taken to ensure the needs of these mares are adequately met.

As a general rule the more horses kept, the more time, effort and resources are required to safeguard their welfare.

Section 5: Health & Welfare

Illness

Everyone responsible for horses should be able to recognise signs of ill health. It is also important that owners and keepers have access to a vet to diagnose or treat any illness, injury or disease. Owners/keepers should have their vet's contact details easily available. Horse passports should be easily accessible; otherwise some treatments may not be available.

Owners and keepers of horses should be able to recognise the normal behaviour of their horses and recognise the signs that indicate poor health. These include:

- *change in appetite or drinking habits. (In donkeys, loss of appetite can be life threatening in a very short period of time so veterinary advice should be sought immediately.);*
- *change in droppings;*
- *change in demeanour or behaviour;*
- *change in weight in either direction;*
- *any signs of pain or discomfort, including reluctance to move, pawing at the ground, rolling, increased rate of respiration and sweating;*
- *reluctance to stand or unable to stand;*
- *any sign of injury or lameness, including puncture wounds; and*
- *any signs of disease, such as discharge from the eye, ear or nose or coughing or breathing difficulties.*

This list is not exhaustive and any change in your horse's behaviour should alert you to the possibility that it might be ill. If you think that there is anything wrong with your horse, contact your veterinary practice.

Routine Health Care

A parasite control programme should be put in place following consultation with a vet. Careful pasture management including the rotation of grazing and dung collection is an important part of an effective parasite control programme.

There should be adequate control of infectious and contagious disease by a programme agreed with a vet, which will include appropriate hygiene and isolation procedures and vaccination.

When a new horse enters premises, the horse should be isolated before being introduced to the rest of the herd. The horse should not be allowed direct contact with other horses during this period, and separate equipment should be used in the grooming and care of the new horse. This period of isolation is to allow the horse to develop any clinical signs of disease that may be incubating at the time of arrival and thus protect the other horses on the yard from becoming infected. The period of isolation and any testing for infectious diseases should be determined in consultation with your vet.

It is recommended that horses are vaccinated against tetanus. Horses can also be vaccinated against infectious diseases such as equine influenza. You should discuss with your vet what vaccinations are most appropriate for your horse as this will depend on its age and use. All horses should be vaccinated against tetanus as horses are very susceptible to this condition.

Teeth should be inspected by a vet or trained equine dental technician at least once a year and treated if necessary. Any treatment which is regarded as an act of veterinary surgery must be carried out by a vet.

Every horse owner and keeper should have some understanding of the care of a horse's feet and the need to treat lameness promptly and effectively. Feet should be trimmed regularly by a competent person and attention should be



paid to their growth and balance. Horses ridden or driven on roads or hard, rough surfaces will need to be regularly shod by a registered farrier.

Flies can cause a great deal of irritation to horses, particularly during the summer, and can introduce infection to wounds so an appropriate treatment from a vet should be used. Midges can also be a source of irritation during the spring and summer. Consideration should be given to preventative fly and midge control through the use of fly repellents.

Care of Older or Ill Horses

As horses become older their needs may become greater and they may well require increased supervision and additional veterinary care. When a horse reaches the end of its active working life, or is very elderly, consideration should be given to whether the horse can be provided with a good quality of life in retirement. Owners have a responsibility to ensure that they or whoever is entrusted with the care of such a horse is fully aware of the needs of that horse.

Euthanasia

Where, in the opinion of a vet, a horse is significantly suffering, has not responded to treatment for a serious injury or condition involving significant pain, has a disease or injury from which there is no prospect of recovery and for which no treatment is available, or where a horse is in such a condition that it would be inhumane to keep it alive, the animal should be humanely destroyed without delay by a vet or a suitably qualified, experienced and equipped person. The horse's welfare must always come first. Therefore, in the interests of the horse, owners should give the issue their full consideration well before the time comes to make a decision to prevent the horse suffering unnecessary pain and distress.

Horse Passports

It is a legal requirement under the Horse Passports Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 for all equines to have a passport identifying the animal.

From March 2010, new regulations on the identification of equines have been in operation. These require all foals born after the 1st July 2009 and older horses not previously identified to be micro chipped when a passport is applied for. For foals, all applications must be submitted by the end of the year of their birth or within six months of birth, whichever is later.

The passport must accompany the horse during all movements with a few exceptions such as an emergency situation.

One of the purposes of horse passports is to record all medicines that each horse receives. It is therefore essential that the passport is available whenever your vet treats your horse so he/she can record the medicines given. If the passport isn't available then the vet may not be able to administer some medicines.

And finally...

Understanding and applying the advice in this booklet will ensure any horses, ponies and donkeys in your care enjoy a happy and healthy life.





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