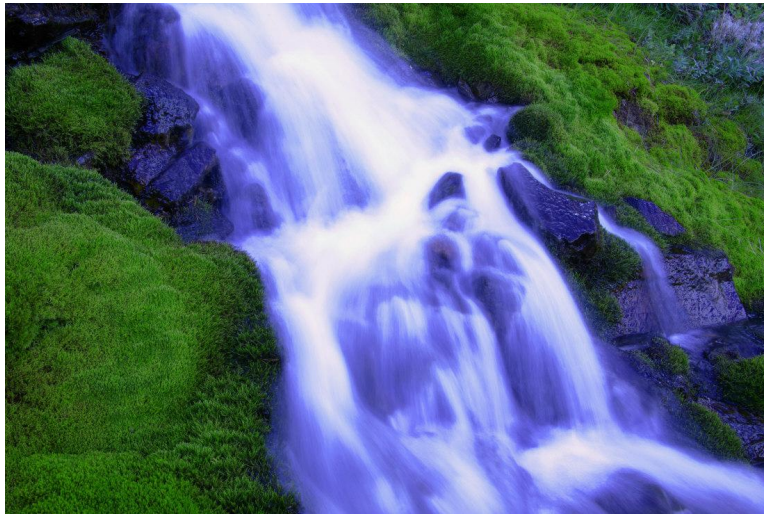


Hydration; It's more than a drop in the bucket

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By Lisa Ross-Williams



Water is life and without it both horse & human would perish. Approximately 68% of a horse's body is water and this fluid is necessary for almost every bodily function. It helps regulate body temperature, transports nutrients, is key in digestion/elimination and much more. By understanding some key points about water and hydration, horse guardians can ensure their equine partners stay hydrated and healthy throughout the year.

How much water?

Although the average water intake for a mature horse is 10-12 gallons per day, in reality there are many factors which dictate how much a horse really needs. It will depend on the horse's size, environmental temperature and humidity, body temperature, activity level, salt intake and even his overall health. Hard-working horses and lactating mares may require twice the normal amount. Therefore, it's extremely important to provide full access to fresh healthy water in a clean tank.

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Dehydration

Dehydration is the loss of body fluids and can range from mild to serious. A loss of 12-15% of body water can be life-threatening and requires immediate veterinary intervention. Dehydration can be caused by inadequate water consumption, fever, choke, heat stroke, long trailering trips, diarrhea, over exercise in hot weather and even some medications.

Signs of this condition include heart rate over 60 bpm, depression, weakness, capillary refill time over 3 seconds, dark urine, dry manure and sunken eyeballs. Pinch the skin on the lower chest; If it stays tented or is slow to spring back, this is a sign of moderate to severe dehydration.

Prevention

Keep your water tanks clean. Heat, sunlight and organic material quickly contribute to algae and fungi in tanks. Loose white salt is great for cleaning tanks and leaves no harmful residue behind. For tougher cases, Lemon essential oil can be added to the salt for added punch. For large tanks, some use goldfish to eat the algae and organic material but this may not work for those with mischievous horses.

Safe, fresh water. Although most drinking water sources are safe, some well water may contain high levels of selenium, arsenic, lead, iron or bacteria. If in doubt, have it tested. Even city water with added fluoride is being linked to serious health issues in horses & dogs. Never connect copper tubing to galvanized pipes as it could result in toxic levels of zinc. A good rule of thumb; if you wouldn't consider drinking the tank water, your horses won't drink their optimum amount.

Importance of salt. Sodium is critical in sustaining normal hydration. Offer free-choice loose white salt (sea salt is preferable) 24/7 and add a minimum of 2 Tbs per day in feed. In very hot and/or humid weather or strenuous exercise, this amount can be doubled. Horses are NOT able to get their daily salt requirement from a salt block.

Electrolytes. An electrolyte mix is not normally required for most idle horses but may be necessary for those who sweat in their daily

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activities. Caution must be used as over-supplementing or dosing a dehydrated horse can overload the urinary system and kidneys.

Support for Dehydration

Dehydration can be a serious and possible life-threatening condition—A veterinarians intervention is needed for moderate to severe cases. For mild cases, there are some natural options for support.

Homeopathic China officinalis can help restore proper fluid balance. 30c potency three times a day for three days.

Herbal Dandelion extract is a natural electrolyte source. 5 ml of extract in equal amounts of water. Syringe into mouth.

Molasses water (not recommended for IR horses) is high in calcium, magnesium and B vitamins. 1 Tbs molasses, 1 Tbs sea salt in 22 pints of water in a bucket.

The take-home message is that many dehydration cases can be prevented by sound water management. Water is life so be pro-active in ensuring your equine partner stays hydrated at all times of the year.

Lisa Ross-Williams is a natural horse care consultant and host of the “If Your Horse Could Talk” webcast available at www.naturalhorsetalk.com. She is a seasoned writer and former Senior Editor of *Equine Wellness Magazine*. Along with her husband, Kenny, they share their small Arizona ranch with their beloved animals.

Lisa has dedicated herself to extensive research, as well as an exploration of hands-on experiences which included clinics, seminars and courses covering natural horsemanship, hoof care, dentistry, bodywork, homeopathy, iridology, essential oils and nutrition. Since then, she has earned her degree in Environmental Plant Science and has completed the Basic Homeopathy Veterinary course through the British Institute of Homeopathy.

Known to colleagues and friends as one who “walks her talk,” Lisa has positively influenced thousands of horse owners and grateful horses, sharing her knowledge of natural and holistic horse care.

