

## The Scoop on Poop; What it can tell you about your horse's health

By Lisa Ross-Williams

Non-horse neighbors don't quite know what to think. "What is she doing over there?" they ask each other as you lean over and poke a manure pile with a stick. Even more confusing is when you lean even closer to take a deep smell. The neighbors might not understand, but savvy horse people do -- manure can give you insight into the health of your horse.



### Get to know your horse's "normal"

Horses are individuals in many ways and stools are no exception. Certainly, the size of the horse influences the size of the manure balls, but even this is no hard rule. Color will vary depending on the current diet but an ideal consistency is soft, formed balls. Manure is passed an average of ten to 12 times per day, possibly more often with horses allowed adequate movement 24/7. Changes in manure can be a good indicator of an issue, so guardians should become good "pooper snoopers" and get to know their equine partner's "normal".

### Consistency is key

Once a horse's "normal" is established, a change in consistency, whether dry or wet, can be a warning.

- Dry, very firm manure may indicate constipation. Often passed in small amounts, the balls may slightly bounce when they hit the ground. They're often smaller than normal and may be covered with mucus. The mucus hardens as it dries and looks like a lacquer finish. This is cause for concern.
- Loose, semi-formed stools should not be confused with diarrhea. Horses who are stressed or starting a diet change may show short-term looseness. It is also common when horses are first turned out to fresh spring grass, and in mares who are starting



heat. As long as it is short-term, does not smell foul, and the horse is otherwise acting normally, it's probably not cause for concern.

- Diarrhea is very liquid and often explosive. It should be cause for alarm. It could be a sign of infection, ingestion of a toxic substance, or other illness. Movements are frequent, may be very foul smelling and soil the legs and tail. Any sign of blood may

indicate "infectious colitis". Get the help of your vet.

Some medications can also cause extremely loose stools. Long term use of NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) such as Bute or Banamine may produce chronic diarrhea by reducing the blood supply to the colon and cecum. Antibiotics may cause acute diarrhea due to the disruption of beneficial gut bacteria. Be sure to provide a good probiotic product during and after antibiotic use.



### Too much sand?

Sand buildup can cause chronic loose stools. Here's a simple test.

Using a small glass jar, add five to six fecal balls, fill the jar halfway with water and shake or stir until dissolved. Wait ten to 15 minutes and observe the amount of sand in the bottom. An alternative method is to use a rubber veterinary glove, follow the instructions above, hang the glove upside down on a fence, and again wait ten to 15 minutes for the sand to settle into the fingers. More than a tablespoon may indicate a need for lifestyle changes to decrease sand ingestion.

**Tip**

Manure can tell you about your horse's dental balance. Watch for large hay pieces and excessive whole grains. These warrant a visit from a certified dental practitioner.

So Don't worry what your neighbors think. Get out there and become a super pooper snooper! Your horse's health depends on it.

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*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.*

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