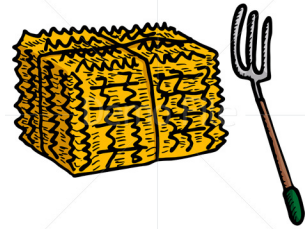


## Winter Preparations By Dr Abby Reising

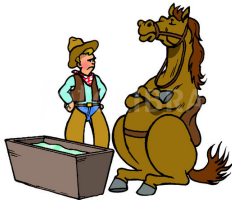
It's that time of year again! The holidays have arrived and so have the lower temperatures! Before the snow begins to fall and temperatures dip below freezing (or zero 😊), it is best to take some basic steps and have a plan in mind to care for your four legged friends.

### ***What's on the menu?***

During the cold weather, it is important to provide your horse with quality nutrition and water to maintain weight and hydration. Forages, or hay, should make up the largest portion of winter diet – approximately 2 % of body weight per day. Horses, like other mammals, burn calories to stay warm. Increasing the amount of hay fed is the best way to keep weight on horses during the winter, as the fermentation process generates internal heat. The normal daily complete feed or grain ration may also have to be increased slightly to maintain an ideal body condition score of 5 on a scale of 1 (emaciated) to 9 (obese). However, please consult with your veterinarian before changing your horse's grain ration significantly.



Providing an adequate water source is very important year round but especially important during the cold months. Research (University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine) shows that if, during cold weather, horses have only warm water available, they will drink a greater volume per day than if they have only cold water available. But, if they have a choice between warm and cold water simultaneously, they drink almost exclusively from the cold and drink a smaller volume than if they have only warm water available. Therefore, you can increase your horse's water consumption by only providing warm water. Use of bucket or tank heaters or by adding hot water twice daily with feeding can help provide warm water. In addition, to encourage your horse to drink more during any time of year, you can provide a salt/mineral block or top-dress the feed with electrolytes.



### ***To blanket or not to blanket?***

Blanketing is a heavily debated topic among horse owners. Generally speaking, horses with an adequate hair coat, in good body condition that have access to shelter probably do not need blanketed. However, horses that have

been clipped, recently transported to a cold climate, or are of thin body condition or sick may need the additional warmth and protection of a blanket. During periods of subzero weather, blanketed or unblanketed, it is important to check your horse frequently for signs of frostbite (ears, muzzle, etc - hardening of the skin, cracking or bleeding, color changes) or hypothermia (shivering, depressed attitude, decreased activity).



Horses begin to grow their longer, thicker winter coats in July, shedding the shorter, thinner summer coats in October. The summer coat begins growing in January with March being prime shedding season. This cycle of hair growth and shedding is based on day length. The winter coat is stimulated by decreasing daylight and the summer coat is stimulated by increasing daylight. Owners can inhibit a horse's coat primarily through providing artificial daylight in the fall but also by clothing their horse as the temperature begins to fall. If the horse's exercise routine in the winter causes him to sweat and the long hair hampers the drying and cooling down process, body clipping may be necessary and a blanket would then be required.

### ***Get Moving!***

Winter is often a time to give a horse a break from regular work. However, it has been shown that muscular strength, cardiovascular fitness and overall flexibility significantly decrease even if daily turnout is provided during down time. In addition, older horses have a longer and more difficult road to return to their previous level of work. Therefore, it may be beneficial to keep your horse in regular light work instead of on turn out during the winter. Unfortunately, not every barn is equipped for winter riding and exercising your horse when it's cold and slippery or frozen can be challenging.



Do your best to lunge, ride or drive in outside areas that are not slippery. Warm up and cool down with care. A good rule of thumb is to spend twice as much time at these aspects of the workout than you do when the weather is warm. And make sure your horse is cool and dry before turning them back outside or applying a blanket. As always, use caution and

practice good safety but if you have the facility - keep your horse moving!

### ***Stay Healthy!***

Fall is the perfect time to have your horse's health checked by a veterinarian at a fall wellness examination. Fall vaccinations (varied depending on your region), dental work and deworming should all be performed or discussed at this exam to ensure your horse is in top shape heading into the colder months. There are a number of health conditions that can be made worse by the cold weather. Horses with arthritis or chronic lameness issues may show more signs of lameness and stiffness in December and January. It is always a good idea to have an anti-inflammatory medication on hand (one that you have discussed with your veterinarian) in case of emergencies. Cold weather also increases the risk of impaction colic which is due to a lack of water intake. As previously discussed, increased water intake may be promoted by providing warm water as the only source or feeding electrolytes. Closed barns and increased time in stalls can lead to dusty environments and can exacerbate respiratory conditions like recurrent airway obstruction. To help prevent a dusty barn and respiratory flare ups, increasing barn ventilation in the barn and increasing turnout time may help. Finally, wet conditions can lead to thrush in the hooves, "scratches" on the legs, and "rain rot" on the body. Regular grooming and daily observation can catch these issues early or even prevent these problems. Consult your veterinarian if your horse's with any questions or concerns.



Don't Forget...

Don't forget about the other critters that live in your barn. Let the cats and dogs sleep in the tack room on those cold nights and make sure that they have plenty of food and water as well!!



Enjoy this holiday season and winter weather! Stay warm!!!