



In Practice

Starting to use Equine Breathing yourself

Well, it's the season for resolutions and making new starts.... If you are thinking about helping your horse recover using Equine Breathing this article gives some words of encouragement to help you get going.

You don't need any special equipment or training to get started. You just need to plan to have 10 minutes of **undisturbed time** with your horse for a few days.

If you are riding your horse a good time might be before you ride, if you are not riding then any convenient time such as before feeding is good. Straight after feeding is never a good time. After the first couple of sessions, it is good to do 1N when the horse is tense, but to start with try to avoid tense times.

- Choose a safe place where you will not be disturbed at least until your horse starts to enjoy and want to do 1N
- Make sure you have enough time and are not rushed
- Put a head collar on your horse (for the first few times)
- Stand by the left hand side of your horse and face nearly the same direction
- Hold the lead rope but **don't overly restrict** the horse
- Put your left hand over the horse's left nostril and completely block all air flow you should feel suction and pressure on the in and out breaths. Try not to allow any leaks, move your hand to find the best position.
- Keep your hand in position for 5 minutes
- Move to the right side, put your right hand on the horse's right nostril and keep it there for 5 minutes
- Keep your own mouth shut and quieten your own breathing
- Don't talk to the horse
- Don't fiddle with the horse, allow them to enjoy the 1N in peace
- Don't give food or tit bits before, during or after the session

Safety

Stand facing almost the same direction as your horse, just slightly angled towards them, so that if they move suddenly your feet are unlikely to be trodden on.

Horses often doze in 1N and may wake abruptly and jump forward at an unexpected disturbance.

When your horse lowers their head in relaxation be careful to keep your back upright. Don't lean in over their head as again, they may twitch in a dream and knock your face. Instead bend your knees (good exercise for your thighs!). Once their head is low enough you can crouch down.

In most cases, after a few minutes the horse will start to feel the benefits of increased carbon dioxide and become drowsy and relaxed, appreciate what is happening and settle down to enjoy the session.

Avoiding mistakes

For some horses the first attempt at 1N can be tricky. If your horse fidgets and tries to get rid of your hand, **your handling** of this initial stage is crucial. You need to avoid two potential mistakes:

1. Only doing a couple of minutes of 1N, and removing your hand while the horse

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In short

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is still fidgeting, with the intention of 'building up gradually'.

If you do this you will not yet have built up enough carbon dioxide to give your horse the pleasant feeling associated with 1N so they will not understand what you are trying to do.

In addition you will have given **control of movement** to your horse which makes them feel more responsible for leadership, adding to their stress and making them more likely to fidget next time.

So make sure you have the resolve, time and peace to fulfil the full 10 minutes of your first few sessions.

2. Using force to make the horse accept 1N.

This goes against the physiological and moral principles of Equine Breathing and does not work in the long run.

So don't have your horse tied up and don't use forceful restraint on the headcollar to keep the horse still and your hand in place. Instead, follow the horse's movements with your arm and if necessary whole body. Keep your hand completely over the nostril the whole time, because if your hand slips off at any time you will lose the carbon dioxide that you are trying to build up.

If after a couple of sessions your horse is still fidgeting rather than chilling there may be an underlying leadership issue, or s/he may have especially poor breathing.

Try doing control of movement exercises (as described in the Equine Breathing Starter Guide) for 10 minutes before doing 1N.

If s/he still hasn't experienced the relaxed state of 1N, analyse your situation. Is an external factor stressing your horse, eg the other horses have all been fed or taken away; or you are feeling nervous or rushed? Rearrange your 1N schedule to remove the extraneous stress factor.

Once your horse understands and enjoys 1N you will find that it is less and less necessary to avoid interruptions or external stressors as the horse will become oblivious to them.

Remember, Equine Breathing is always an enjoyable experience. If you or your horse are not enjoying the session, analyse the situation to see what is going wrong using the text above and get the Equine Breathing back on track.

You might wish to make a note of your horse's symptoms (at their worst ever and their current level) before you start.

Although very gentle, 1N can have profound effects and as your horse heals it's easy to forget how bad things were unless you keep a record.

A record sheet for monitoring your horse's progress is available in the Equine Breathing Starter Guide.

FAQ

"I'm a busy person with little enough time for my horse already, why should I spend the time doing Equine Breathing?"

The answer to this is in your answers to several more questions that you can ask yourself in the following **Mini Quiz**.

1. Is my horse 100% well both physiologically and emotionally?

If the answer is no then ask yourself;

2. how much time, money and effort do I currently spend on managing the symptoms? eg negligible / some / significant

3. how much of a nuisance are the symptoms to me? *eg negligible / somewhat / significant*

4. how much of a nuisance are the symptoms to the horse? *eg negligible / somewhat / significant*

5. how has the horse's health/behaviour changed over the last few years?
eg stable (but requiring more management) / deteriorating (requiring increasing management) or improving (with increased management)

6. do I feel that the horse's symptoms indicate that the horse's health is affected at some level? *no / yes*

7. do I feel morally obliged to get my horse back to the best possible health? *no / yes*

8. do I believe Equine Breathing will restore health? *no / yes*

For example if your horse has a fairly benign case of Cushings, you may have got down to question 6 answering mainly 'negligible', but find that you answer 'yes' to 6 and 7. If it is 'no' to 6 and 7 then your answer to the overall question might be that you shouldn't spend the time, although there are other reasons to do 1N such as giving your horse a pleasant experience, building rapport and confidence and giving yourself a short spell of peace.

Now for question 8. You can read on the website page 'How does it work?' about the physiology behind Equine Breathing and evidence for its success, but the best way to answer this question is to give it a trial run yourself. Start using 1N for say a week and use all your powers of observation to see if you think that Equine Breathing is having any effect.

You may get immediate relief of symptoms and improvement in health, or you may get a change in symptoms, a flare up or a clearing as described in the Starter Guide. Or you may see little change but find that your horse loves it. Overall you will get a feel for whether you think it is worth continuing with Equine Breathing.

People who like to spend time just being with their horses find that 1N is an interesting and rewarding addition to their schedule - even before the results start showing up.

Busy people concentrating on riding or otherwise working their horses may focus on the changes.

People who over breathe and tend to rush through their activities may even find it difficult to relax for long enough to do the 1N. If you find doing 1N stressful because you feel you should be doing something else, don't force it. Get a friend to do the 1N, or use the Equine Breather which is more versatile and can be used without interrupting your usual schedule.

Equine Breathing is not a substitute for veterinary care. Consult your vet before using Equine Breathing.