



Horse Breather

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Does my horse over breathe?

How do you know if your horse is starting to develop breathing problems but your vet has not diagnosed any specific ailment?

Over breathing is a response to stress and chronic (long term) over breathing in my view results in chronic ailments such as COPD, sweet itch and hay fever; and behavioural problems such as separation anxiety and stable vices. So if your horse has a chronic problem I would expect him or her to be over breathing.

But what if your horse does not (yet) suffer from a chronic problem? In my experience they are still likely to be over breathing - but how do you tell if a horse is over breathing?

People sometimes ask whether over breathing is very fast, shallow breathing, or very deep breathing.

In fact it can be either. Its the **amount** of air taken in each minute that is important and this can be too large when horse breathes fast and shallow **or** when it breathes deep and slow, or even at the normal frequency of 8 to 16 breathes per minute when the horse is at rest.

Over breathing refers to the **volume** of air breathed and occurs when the volume of air is bigger than normal, resulting in more carbon dioxide being lost than is produced by metabolism. In normal breathing the amount of carbon dioxide lost from the lungs is equal to the amount produced by cellular activity so that the body's carbon dioxide remains at the same level over time.

If you can distinguish the **in** from the **out** breath by movement of the nostrils (or the nostril flares) and or you can hear air going in or out when the horse is at rest then the horse is over breathing.

Often over breathing also involves non rhythmic breathing with erratic changes in depth or frequency which may range from a rapid fluttering breathing to a sharp sigh or prolonged pause.

In my experience it is rare to find a horse that **doesn't** over breathe (until it starts Equine Breathing!). But in the horse that does have optimal breathing it is not easy to distinguish the in from the out breath, by sight or sound in relation to the nostril when the horse is at rest. The breathing is imperceptible.

The nostrils are much smaller and seem less open than we are used to and are more slit shaped than round and flared. They don't change shape as the horse breathes.

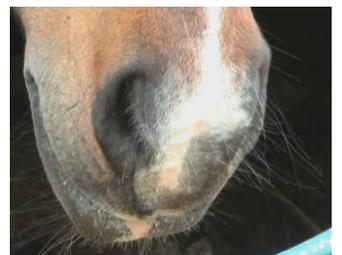
Because it is unusual to find a horse with optimal breathing I believe we tend to be used to horses that over breathe and until we start to pay attention to the breathing pattern, may not realise that anything is amiss.

Once you become interested in breathing you may start to see how common over breathing is. Horses that over breathe often look as if they have just been galloping even when they have only been at rest.

large flared nostril in over breathing horse at rest



normal nostril at rest



I find that many horses seem to have oversized nostrils that take up a large proportion of their muzzles but this is sometimes not recognised by owners until it is pointed out.

Horses that do Equine Breathing tend to have smaller nostrils. A horse's nostrils may even seem to reduce in size during an Equine Breathing session.

Many riders do notice that when exercised, their horse's breathing becomes much more noisy, heavy or harsh than they feel is normal. They also often notice that the horse takes a long time to get their breath back after exercise.

What to do? Start Equine Breathing using the free download on the website. You may wish to record the breathing by camera, video and measurements (eg breaths per minute, maximum nostril size at rest etc) before you start so that you can see how effective the Equine Breathing is in retraining the breathing.

You may find it useful to watch presenters on television. At first they may seem quite normal but closer inspection shows that they take noisy mouth breaths during their speech and the upper chest, and even neck and shoulders are seen to move in the breathing pattern. These are all indications of over breathing but they seem normal to us because they are so common.

Once you start to notice these signs you may find you become more and more sensitive to them in others and in yourself.

If you are lucky enough to see a person with optimal breathing, you will see there is no chest movement or noisy breathing. The breathing is imperceptible with only diaphragmatic movement, and these people tend to emanate a sense of calmness and strength.

If you have any feedback or queries I would be pleased to hear from you.

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breathe easy
Clare