

## In Practice

### **Interventions – direct use against symptoms**

Regular Equine Breathing sessions are the cornerstone of the process of regaining normal breathing. But the additional use of Equine Breathing at carefully selected times in relation to your horse's behaviour or metabolic response, can be very effective.

I call this use an 'intervention' - the Equine Breathing is used specifically to affect a response to a stimulus. It may be a particular behavioural response such as the onset of separation anxiety, phobias or stable vices or a physiological response such as the onset of allergies or respiratory difficulties.

In humans, an asthma attack starts with a series of physiological steps and responses that culminate in the full blown attack. Buteyko teaches asthmatics to become alert to the very first step in this pathway which may be for example a vague feeling of unease or thinking "Where is my inhaler?" The asthmatic then takes control of their breathing. Instead of cascading down the old familiar pathway to an asthma attack, they set up a new pathway. This involves reduced rather than increased breathing and thus averts the attack and provides a feeling of self empowerment and calmness instead. Eventually after some repetitions the old steps leading to the asthma attack habit are superseded by the new positive pathway.

In horses the handler obviously has to try and identify the points in the horse's routine when the horse habitually goes into the undesirable response. This is the point when the horse's breathing deteriorates and increases either by becoming deeper or faster. Here are some examples.

- For the anxious type; Waiting for a feed
  - Going out for a hack
  - Doing school work
  - Going to a show
  - Being left behind when companions are taken away
- For the hay fever sufferer, starting to graze
- For the wind sucker seeing their owner first arrive, their owner leaving, arriving in a favourite wind sucking spot, etc
- For the sweet itch sufferer times of day when midge activity is highest
- For stable vices, being left in a stable.

Wendy's pony Chippy tends to get a bit flustered out on rides. Riding back one day Chippy was doing her usual 90mph walk, breathing rapidly, snorting and giving a little head toss with each breath. Wendy got off and did about 5 minutes 1N.

Initially Chippy objected quite strongly but then soon calmed right down and settled into it. Wendy then resumed her ride. She was impressed to find that Chippy's walk was now relaxed and a normal pace and that she only snorted about 5 times in the remaining three quarters of a mile home. Wendy's 5 minutes of 1N, it seems, had broken the cycle and replaced adrenaline production and tension with a new calm response. Without the 1N Chippy's tense response probably would have lowered her carbon dioxide levels with possible consequences for her general health and breathing.

Chippy's initial objection is not surprising. She wanted to get home because she felt some unease. Having to stop and do 1N when she just wanted to rush back would have been quite difficult. However when she realised that the Equine Breathing made her feel ok, she no longer had to rush home and was able to enjoy the 1N and the rest of the ride.

Interventions work best when the horse, like Chippy knows and enjoys regular Equine Breathing and therefore responds quickly to the 1N when its offered.

Kirsty emailed to say that her horse, Hagar an 11yr arab mare has a terrible separation anxiety problem. Kirsty wanted to restrict her grazing but to do so had

to separate her from her best pal. Kirsty said "She just works herself up into a stressed/sweating mess by weaving along the gate of the paddock even though there are other horses around. If she is stabled she weaves and runs backwards and forwards. This is very stressful for her and me!"

I asked if Kirsty could wait for a week or so before separating Hagar and in the meantime do some regular Equine Breathing. Once Hagar is breathing a bit better and has recognised the benefits of the Equine Breathing Kirsty can use an intervention when she first tries a separation.

I would suggest that she does Equine Breathing (the Equine Breather is helpful in these situations) with plenty of exercise for a while (maybe 15 – 30 minutes) until Hagar is very relaxed. Then make the separation but continue with the Equine Breathing and exercise until Hagar is completely relaxed. I would then leave her for a few minutes in her relaxed state and then put her back with her friend. The next day I would expect her to manage longer on her own and would build up until eventually Hagar can stay separated and stay calm.

Fin, a young wind sucker gave a lovely illustration of a successful intervention. She had initially wind sucked in between mouthfuls of hay fed from the ground. Following Equine Breathing she was now able to eat hay from the ground without wind sucking but her owner wanted to show me what happened when she had a hay net. On her first pull on the net Fin wind sucked directly on the haynet itself, not even going to the favoured adjacent window ledge. The pulling and arching action used to extract the hay started as a similar movement to wind sucking and seemed to almost trigger the wind sucking, despite several months of good work with Equine Breathing.

I must say when I saw this my heart sank but with the Equine Breather on and we walked Fin for a few minutes then come back to the hay. This time she did one normal pull then a wind suck. More walking in the Breather and this time she did 2 normal pulls and then a wind suck. The exercise was repeated and she did 4 normal pulls before wind sucking, and then next time 12. Then she was able to eat normally for several minutes at a time and if she did wind suck it was tiny. She ate for a while longer but got more and more relaxed and then fell asleep mid mouthful.

This sleepiness is quite a common reaction in interventions. Its almost as if the removal of adrenaline from the situation allows the horse to go into a deep healing state instead.

Wind sucking is usually a difficult habit for horses to break and Equine Breathing interventions in addition to a routine program certainly seem to help in their recovery.

## Feedback

### ***Amazon's cough***

This is an update from Karen who's horse, Amazon, as reported in 'Horse Breather' 6 consistently coughed when being ridden, but not when being lunged either before or after riding. Following use of 1N before riding Amazon became cough free and gave lovely soft, relaxed work. When Karen tried **not** doing 1N, Amazon coughed for the whole ride and her work was strained.

Karen wrote:

*"I wondered whether you'd like a bit of an update on my mare Amazon after all our correspondence before I went on holiday? I have been back now for three weeks and after an initial couple of sessions where her cough was still present (nowhere near as bad as it originally was!) I rode her today and the cough has all but gone!! I have done the 1N technique prior to every ridden session (5 minutes on each nostril) and it really seems to be doing the trick.*

*I would also endorse a couple of points you made in this month's ezine:*

*- definitely do the "Perfect Manners" exercises or similar as I am sure this has helped her to trust me and although she was a bit wary to start she is now almost asleep within a matter of seconds when I do the 1N on her!! I am only able to ride 3 or 4 times a week so its not like I'm doing it with her every day to get this benefit.  
- she has most definitely improved in her fitness over the past few weeks!! She is rather tubby from all the rich grass coming through but her fitness just keeps on improving! Our lessons are improving all the time with our instructor saying that each lesson is the best she has ever seen us work!*

*My next stage is to do the 1N at my first dressage comp for quite a few months (ie this weekend!) I have always been rather frustrated that she can give me such great work at home then goes daft when she is out. I do now exercise her at home before we go out which helps but I am hoping that this will be the icing on the cake*



*Fin nods off half way through her hay net after an Equine Breathing intervention*

*and will help us to be more successful this season!*

*Thanks for your advice (and even more thanks from Amazon!) I think we're both a lot happier and healthier from using this technique!!"*

*The information in this newsletter is for educational purposes only. Equine Breathing is not a substitute for veterinary care. Consult your vet before using Equine Breathing.*