



# Horse Breather

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## Starting the Sensitive Horse on the Equine Breathing Horse Course

The Equine Breathing Horse Course is a series of five Equine Breathing sessions (of approximately 90 minutes) run over a variable period depending on the horse and their problems.

There are two objectives. One is to get the horse started on their Equine Breathing program by directly helping the horse. The second is to work with the owner, familiarising them with 1N, and with more powerful methods of Equine Breathing, and identifying how best use Equine Breathing in their own particular situation and conditions. The course is especially helpful for owners of sensitive horses.

Many horses immediately sense the benefit of Equine Breathing. Owners start using it having read the website and or the Starter Guide and just go on and reap the benefits. But there is a significant minority of horses that are initially resistant to Equine Breathing. Calli is one such and I must admit that it would have been hard for a novice Horse Breather to know how to deal with her.

See the Equine Breathing Starter Guide for more on Control of Movement exercises

There are two reasons why horses may initially resist Equine Breathing, one is a leadership issue and the other is concern caused by unfamiliar physical sensations. The first, arises when the horse believes that it is the leader and must therefore 'stay on duty', must not relax or lose control. This is easily addressed by doing some control of movement exercises (COMs) that convince the horse that the handler is the leader and therefore can be trusted to look after things if the horse relaxes.

Physical sensations arise when the Equine Breathing puts the body out of balance by increasing carbon dioxide (a good thing). The body is 'tuned' to run in the old balance (even though it may be deleterious) so tries to regain the old equilibrium and symptoms such as tickly noses resulting in snorting or coughing work to achieve this by blowing off the newly acquired carbon dioxide.

You can try this on yourself if you are new to Equine Breathing. Sit quietly without slumping and cup your hands over your nose and mouth and breathe gently. After a while you may notice strange sensations, like wanting to talk, coughing, yawning, sneezing or sighing. Some may be quite powerful as the body attempts to blow off the newly collected (useful!) carbon dioxide

Horses get these sensations too and it means that the Equine Breathing has been successful in increasing carbon dioxide but if the sensations are too strong it may be unsettling. It's a delicate balance therefore to do enough to encourage the horse to realise that Equine Breathing is enjoyable, (overcoming any leadership issues first) but not to the point where the bodily sensations become irritating.

Calli is a sensitive mare and as such was a joy to work with. But I had to keep the level of Equine Breathing lower than I would normally expect to use. However the point is, that with Calli the lower level was still effective and to have pushed Calli to go faster would have been counter productive.

We had to persuade her to keep going until she reached the realisation that Equine Breathing was enjoyable ie not give up. I did more COMs work which helped her feel safe and able to get through the strange sensations she seemed to be having in her nose (she was doing slow upward stretches with her head and snorting).

Gradually the horse will become more accustomed to the increasing levels of carbon dioxide and will become less sensitive.

I am grateful to owner Lesley for writing up her thoughts on Calli's horse course as she was such a good example of the need to get this balance right.

## **Calli's Equine Breathing horse course**

Lesley Humphrey

Calisia is a pure-bred grey arab mare, she is 15hhs, 8yrs old and I have had her for a year & half. She is known as Calli.

When I bought her she was only recently backed and had had only basic schooling. She had run with the herd, her dam and various siblings and other horses, up to that time.

She was very friendly and very calm and extremely popular with everyone. I had intended to keep her at home but she became quite stressed and was obviously not happy and I felt I was letting her down as I had no idea how to cope with her. She is my first horse and the only one I have had any experience of handling and looking after. I decided that she was lonely so I took her to a livery stable where she had regular schooling and hacking out, which she enjoys very much. She seemed settled and they were very pleased with her progress.

At the beginning of September this year I moved her to a D I Y yard near my home where my sister also has a horse. She became very stressed again and was difficult to handle. She was over breathing, although at the time I did not realise this, and was again making me nervous. This in turn made her worse and she played me up quite a bit. She lacked concentration, was not very well mannered and was very fidgety. She also had a patch of rind fever on her heel.

My sister had done an Equine Breathing course with her new horse in 2004 and from being very stressed, almost impossible to handle and ill mannered he calmed down a great deal and she discovered that he is actually a very nice gentle horse. She suggested that I should try Equine Breathing with Calli.

Initially Calli found it quite difficult to cope with the IN and fidgeted and threw her head around, and it made her snort and fly worry. She is a very sensitive little flower so Clare kept the breathing gentle with movement and exercises in between and after a while she calmed down and stood quietly for short periods.

She seemed very unfit and was puffing when Clare walked and trotted her. Then she started barging and throwing her head high, testing Clare out, who worked on her breathing and used control of movement exercises (COMs) to continually move her around and reward her for responding. This calmed her down.

When I tried working with her she immediately became anxious again so I concentrated on my own breathing (through my nose with my mouth shut) and tried to do everything Clare told me. Somewhat to my surprise Calli did calm down and I managed the COM exercises better than I had thought I would, although I did not find it easy. I felt very clumsy and as if I was fumbling at everything.

I am happy to say that I now feel much more in control of both the horse and myself and Calli is calm and responsive. If she gets flustered at all I am able to quickly regain her attention using the COM exercises.

On subsequent sessions she became calmer and more relaxed. She seemed much happier with IN and was more attentive and no longer spooked by birds, tractors etc. On one occasion she wanted to roll so we took her head collar off and she had a good roll on both sides and a shake and a stretch. We left her loose and Clare walked me all around the manege and to my surprise and great pleasure Calli followed us round and stood just behind us when we stopped – we had join up! I found this a very emotional experience.

There were times during the sessions when I found the IN quite difficult and stressing. Sometimes I felt we were going backwards, but Clare explained about return of symptoms and I realised, also, that it was often just to test me and my trustworthiness as leader.

I am persevering with my breathing, which I know was dreadful. Apart from any other long-term benefits, I find it to be very calming and relaxing.

We also put Vaseline on her hind feet. Initially she would not stand still but after a couple of tries she didn't mind at all. It is now completely cleared.

On one occasion we walked down to the manege and having been fine and calm from the field she planted her feet, threw her head up and refused to move I didn't know how to handle it but Clare talked me through it, getting me to keep up the pressure and move her head gently from side to side until I got a small step. It seemed to me to last for ages but Clare assured me it did not! Suddenly she just relaxed and stepped forward perfectly, and I appeared to have passed that test.

In the last session we worked more on lead practice COM and I became more aware of loss of focus and control of movement and evasions from Calli and learnt how to control her instead. I found it fascinating throughout the course to see both the effects of the breathing and also her responses to COM commands which are so small and calm and non aggressive. I shall continue to practise COMs and to use the breathing to keep her healthy, feeling calm, secure and happy which is all I really want her to be.

I am so grateful to Clare for her wonderful methods and her quietly gentle way of imparting knowledge. I would recommend this course to anyone, not only those who feel they have a "naughty", or difficult horse.

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