



# Horse Breather

Equine Breathing e-zine      issue 70



[www.equinebreathing.com](http://www.equinebreathing.com)

## Improving Competition Performance

When you go to shows, if your horse suffers from any of the following:

- Nervous stress in various forms
- Poor performance (compared to work at home)
- Loss of fluidity in movement or stiffness
- Reduced impulsion
- Lack of attention to the rider
- Separation anxiety
- Loading or travelling difficulties
- Increased snorting, neighing, pawing the ground, headshaking etc
- Lack of speed, endurance or stamina
- Tying up
- Exercise induced pulmonary haemorrhage

then Equine Breathing may be able to help improve your performance. Even if you don't have any of these problems, Equine Breathing may still improve performance. Reducing over breathing has numerous benefits due to the biochemistry involved. Here's how.

### First improve general health

Do Equine Breathing to help recover from chronic conditions such as head shaking and anxiety and to improve the overall health.

Breathing and adrenaline production are linked – one increasing the other and resulting in the 'catabolic' flight or fight state. This is beneficial for short bursts of intense activity as the body's resources are mostly directed to muscular activity. In addition, adrenaline produces feelings of anxiety and restlessness. This is all essential if you are about to flee for your life or go round a XC course,

However horses that chronically over breathe tend to get stuck in this adrenalised 'catabolic' state and are unable to shut off the adrenaline. They are likely feel wound up all the time – especially in new circumstances.

In opposition to the catabolic flight or fight state is the 'anabolic' state of relaxation, characterised by increased parasympathetic nervous system activity, including cell growth, maintenance and repair – ie healing. These crucial activities may be neglected if the horse remains largely in the adrenalised catabolic state.

By reducing over breathing, Equine Breathing is able to help the horse into the anabolic state of calm and relaxation in which activities promoting health can take place. The horse can still snap into the adrenalised state immediately, when required.

Another reason that Equine Breathing is calming is that the low carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) resulting from over breathing affects nerve cells which makes the horse hypersensitive to stimuli (spooky) and makes concentrating difficult. Equine Breathing helps bring CO<sub>2</sub> levels up towards normal, reversing this excitable state.

Increasing the body's carbon dioxide levels through Equine Breathing **increases** the amount of oxygen that can be taken up in the lungs. and **increases** the amount of oxygen available to the cells

When a horse works more intensively the oxygen demand grows and if it cannot be met the cells have to go into anaerobic respiration. So from a physiological point of view increasing the oxygen availability through Equine Breathing is likely to increase fitness. And this is supported by reports from owners of performance horses. Equine Breathing sessions have been found to lower resting heart rate and to reduce recovery times after exertion.

## **Specific benefits of Equine Breathing on a show day**

### **Loading and travelling**

Equine Breathing your horse while you are preparing to travel is calming and relaxing. 1N or a Breather can be used up to and including loading, and during travelling if they are accustomed to it, and can be supervised.

Following unloading, if the horse is excitable in new surroundings, Equine Breathing can be used to regain composure (for both of you!).

### **Warming up**

Since reducing over breathing increases circulation and oxygen availability there is increased potential for aerobic respiration which helps to promote CO<sub>2</sub> production which in a positive cycle involving the Bohr effect, further increases oxygen availability. So the muscles will be able to continue to respire aerobically (using oxygen) for longer upon exertion. This is good because once muscles are forced into anaerobic respiration they produce significantly less energy and also the waste product, lactic acid. Lactic acid can build up and reduce muscle functioning and can also result in stiffness and tying up.

Carbon dioxide is an important muscle relaxant. Low CO<sub>2</sub> is a feature of over breathing and is likely to make muscles more stiff and prone to injury. Whereas improved breathing and CO<sub>2</sub> levels are likely to improve suppleness and fluidity

It's not just the muscles that benefit from the improved circulation and oxygen availability of better breathing. The brain also benefits meaning that the horse is likely to have better concentration, problem solving ability and connection with the rider – important safety considerations in some sports.

### **After your class**

In many cases the increased activity of the event itself will increase production of carbon dioxide by the muscles. A few minutes of Equine Breathing after your class will slow down the loss of this extra CO<sub>2</sub>, making it available to the body. This may for example, help in getting cells back into aerobic respiration as quickly as possible and removing lactic acid from muscles enabling muscles to recover fully and more quickly.

Plus of course it is calming and enables the horse to switch off adrenaline and come back into the anabolic state. Reminding the horse how to breathe in stressful situations will also be beneficial in terms of their Equine Breathing program.

If the horse is blowing hard then it's best to wait a bit and then use either out breathe 1N or an All Weather Breather to help recover the breathing.

### **Help by improving your own breathing**

The principles, and the benefits in fitness, relaxation, suppleness and focus, that may be gained by Equine Breathing are equally applicable to people. If you keep your mouth closed, stop talking and gentle your own breathing when you Equine Breathe your horse and it can help both of you.

If you build up to keeping your mouth shut even when you compete and the benefits will be even better.

### **When to do Equine Breathing and how much?**

If you do Equine Breathing each time your horse starts to stress at a show, it's likely s/he will stress less and less. When things are going well and the horse is calm and attentive, a little Equine Breathing can go a long way. Generally you can do some before you warm up and compete, and some afterwards, and at any time in the day when you feel that the horse would enjoy a chill out.

How much varies from day to day and between different horses. Ideally continue Equine Breathing until the horse is completely calm and relaxed and enjoying the session. This may be quicker to achieve as the horse's general breathing pattern improves. Once the horse immediately relaxes into a breathing session do between 5 and 30 minutes as a rough guide.

On a show day you may do more Equine Breathing and exercise than usual. this may increase the rate of healing with a resulting increase in waste production. You may find that your horse has an increased appetite for the un refined (grey) salt so you may need to offer more than usual.

In the days after the competition, Equine Breathing may help improve the rate of recovery of any injuries or tired muscles.

### **Other benefits for performance horses**

The sort of benefits owners report include increased correct muscle development, longer lasting fitness and faster healing from training or competition injuries. Skin and coat improvements; and old scars and lumps become active and this time heal properly. Horse's energy and demeanour improve and of course recovery from chronic symptoms that can interfere with competing, such as headshaking and sweet-itch

The contents of this ezine are not a substitute for veterinary advice. If the reader has any concerns they should seek independent professional advice from a vet.