

Cough and anxiety 1N case study 2026 report

Kristina Koudelova



This case features a 15-year-old Grand Prix-level show jumper gelding who was coughing, dealing with anxiety, and displaying significant tension during work. His coughing was serious enough to render him unfit for the demands of high-level sport.

Even though the owners diligently followed all veterinary advice and were meticulous in his management for more than 3 years, the symptoms unfortunately didn't improve to a level compatible with continued participation in competitions.

Nowadays, he is stabled on dust-free bedding and fed only haylage or steamed hay; his paddock is fully grassy (no dry, dusty patches), and he works only during the cooler parts of the day. When agricultural work is being done near his paddock, he remains in his box to avoid excessive dust exposure.

In the past, nose stickers were also used to help with his coughing and breathing. These days, nose stickers are no longer used. He usually uses the inhaler regularly. However, during the case study, inhaler use was discontinued to evaluate the effect of Equine Breathing alone.

During the initial evaluation of symptom severity, when I saw the horse being worked under saddle, he had an especially bad day. He coughed 11 times during the ride. He coughed not only during the initial trot but also repeatedly throughout the training session. His breathing was audible and heavy, and he displayed significant tension and anxiety.

He held his head and neck elevated, his back was rigid, and he tended to speed up as the training session progressed. He even spooked at a bush that grows around the riding arena. Last but not least, the biomechanics of his hind end didn't look entirely correct and lacked fluidity in motion. There was an irregularity in his movement, and the rider noted that, in lay terms, the horse sometimes "loses his left hind leg".

During the 1-month trial, I used only the 1N Equine Breathing technique to assess how much this simple training method can help the horse. I didn't combine it with any of the Equine Breathers or other Equine Breathing techniques, and I conducted all the Equine Breathing sessions myself to ensure consistency across sessions. Each day over the 4 weeks, we spent 30–35 minutes on Equine Breathing.

Initially, covering the right nostril was more difficult for the horse and elicited stronger responses. By the end of the 1N trial, this difference between the sides had dissipated.

The rider was a great help, assiduously monitoring changes in the horse's breathing and behaviour under saddle and throughout the horse's day-to-day life during the trial with a critical eye. Thanks to her, I knew about every little change and every little cough the horse made throughout the day, which made tracking the progress of this case study even more precise.

I really appreciate this collaboration because she provided me with the riding scores and information about his breathing throughout the day; therefore, I feel the results were more objective and weren't biased by my perception or my personal desire to see improvement in the horse.

The first breakthrough occurred during his first week of Equine Breathing. He stopped coughing. It took only THREE Equine Breathing sessions. The rider was ecstatic. The horse had been coughing for years every time she asked him to trot at the start of the ride. Some rides were worse; some were better, but the coughing was ever-present at least during the initial trot.

In the following weeks, the coughing returned on some days; however, its severity gradually decreased, and by the final week there was only one day when the horse coughed, and it was only once.

This shows how powerful this simple training technique can be. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the disappearance of symptoms is only the start of the healing process, and the horse will need to continue with Equine Breathing to heal invisible damage, which may take time.

By the end of the second week, the rider noted a significant decrease in anxiety and tension. He was so good that she decided to take him hacking out for the first time in his life. In the past, this would not have been possible because he would get too anxious and tense, and there was a high chance he would take off with the rider.

Over the following weeks his anxiety and tension score slowly dropped. He improved so much that, even when a deer jumped out of the bushes and ran alongside the horses during one ride, he didn't spook. He just looked up, watched the deer, and continued without changing gait or breaking into a crazy canter and running away in panic.

By the end of the 4 weeks, his nervous system became less prone to over-reacting; it gained the ability to calm down more quickly and better self-regulate. It might seem like a mundane thing, but something as ordinary as a whip flag used to be a big issue for this horse and couldn't be used in training because it would cause him a great deal of anxiety. Nowadays, the flag can be used for purposeful communication without any unease from the horse.

Week three was full of pendiculation, which is a natural process in which the body contracts, lengthens, and relaxes the muscles. It resets the nervous system, releases chronic tension and tightness in the muscles, and improves body awareness. Many people call pendiculation 'cat-like stretches'

The horse became very quick to relax during the Equine Breathing sessions and calmed down more quickly after being disturbed, not only during those sessions but also during riding.

He always seemed very happy to see me and started to relax as soon as I put the halter on. Once, he even nickered when he saw me coming. It was clear he really enjoyed his breathing training.

Even in his everyday life, he became more "chilled". The rider shared that he stopped rushing forward under saddle, and she was tempted to use leg aids to ask him to move more forward. It was important, however, to let him go at his own pace and wait for his energy to return. Healing can be tiring. It is quite possible he was driven by adrenaline for a long time in his hyperactive state, and coming back down left him feeling tired. Pushing him back to his more active state could have been counterproductive at this stage of healing.

Week four was a week of greater self-awareness and body exploration. He began exploring his body more deeply. It was fascinating to watch the small and larger body movements he went through during each Equine Breathing session and how they affected his movement patterns, abilities, and posture. The rider commented that his transitions improved considerably and became more fluid.



There were many fascinating moments. One example was when he was worked from the ground, and the rider told me that the horse found it more difficult to canter on the right lead. During the following breathing session, he repeatedly lifted and lowered his right front leg and moved his left hind leg. I also noted that he was gently shifting weight from left to right, keeping more weight on his left front leg, and swinging more to the left. Considering that canter to the right starts with the left hind leg and the right front leg as the leading leg, this made me wonder about the connection to his body movements during the breathing session. Interestingly, in the following training sessions, his right canter became better than his left canter.

This is just one small example of all the amazing moments, experiences, and transformations I witnessed. Moreover, for several training sessions now, the biomechanics of the pelvis and hind legs have vastly improved. The rider said she hasn't seen him "lose his left hind leg" for several training sessions now. Interestingly, I observed that many times during the Equine Breathing he was moving his left hind leg.

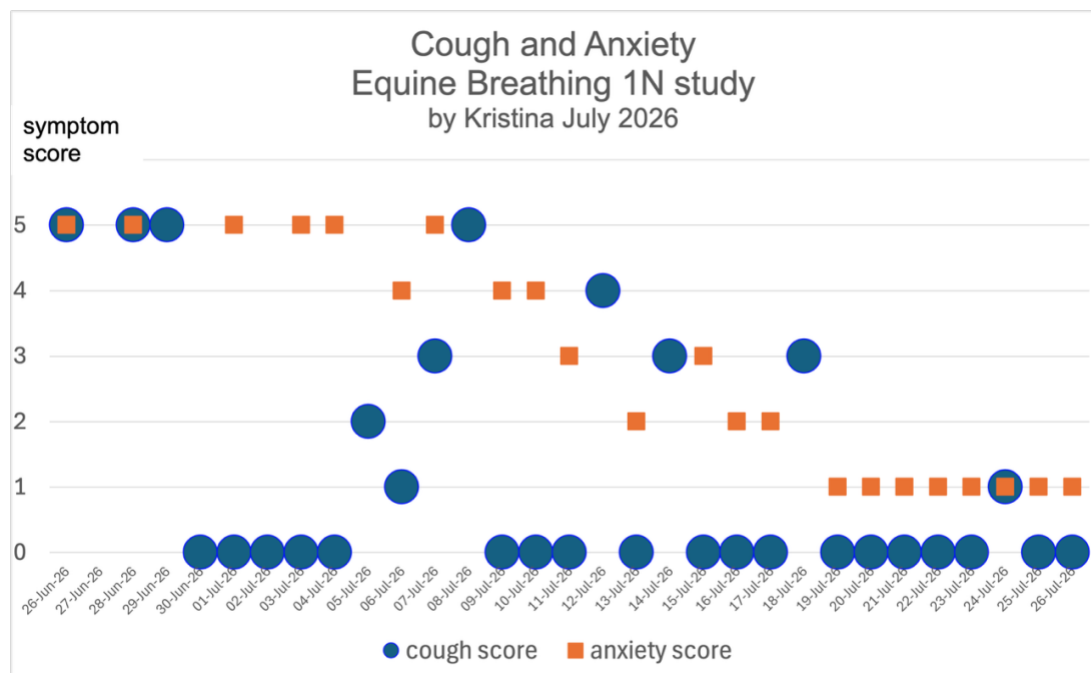
In motion, his back is now swinging freely; he is telescoping his head and neck in a relaxed manner forward and adequately down, his thoracic sling is better engaged, and his hind end has found the fluidity and regularity in motion it was lacking at the beginning.

Last but not least, although his feeding routine remained unchanged, the horse gained some weight. As the rider joked, the horse became more inflated. I believe this was due to profound changes in his physiology.

To sum it all up, something extraordinary happened every week during the one-month trial. I have learned so much from this wonderful horse. It was truly eye-opening. I witnessed a transformation from an anxious, tense, and coughing horse to a more confident, self-regulated, and relaxed horse that rarely coughs and uses his body more effectively.

I defined scores for the symptoms with a score of 5 being the worst, down to zero for no symptoms. I then scored the cough and the anxiety every day so that I could monitor his progress over the 4 weeks.

Chart showing the reduction of symptoms from scores of 5 at the start to scores of zero or 1 over the 4 weeks



To breathe is to live. This case study highlights that breathing is far more than a simple gas exchange. It has a profound impact on whole-body physiology, bodily functions, the nervous system, biomechanics, and posture. It brings to mind what Dr. Lewit, world authority on musculo-skeletal medicine once said:

“If breathing is not normalised, no other movement pattern can be.” and

“Respiration is our primary and most important movement pattern... and also the most dysfunctional.”

I realize now that I hadn't fully appreciated the depth of these words until I was introduced to Equine Breathing and saw with my own eyes the changes in the horses on so many levels. I hope the owners will be open to continuing with Equine Breathing by using the All Weather breather, and that the healing will continue successfully.

The score definitions that I used

Coughing

Score

Definition

- | | |
|---|--|
| 5 | coughing in the stable/pasture even when he is not exercised heavy breathing when in the box/pasture, even when not exercised or worked |
| 4 | coughing in the stable on exercise day heavy breathing only during riding/working coughing multiple times during the riding session; coughing is not limited to the initial trotting |
| 3 | no coughing in the box/pasture no heavy breathing coughing more than 6 times during the riding session |
| 2 | coughing 3 - 6 times, mostly limited to the initial trot |
| 1 | coughing only 1-2 times during the initial trot |
| 0 | no coughing at all |

Anxiety and tension

Score

Definition

- | | |
|---|--|
| 5 | 81 - 100% of the ride horse in tension |
| 4 | 61 - 80% of the ride horse in tension |
| 3 | 41 - 60% of the ride horse in tension |
| 2 | 21 - 40% of the ride horse in tension |
| 1 | 0 - 20% of the ride horse in tension |
| 0 | Relaxed for the whole ride |