



Best start for horses that find 1N difficult at first

[free instructions for 1N](#)

There are several reasons why a horse might find 1N difficult at first.

Fear of relaxation

Fear of relaxation seems to be fairly common. Relaxation includes an element of vulnerability. We can imagine that a horse may have had bad experiences when vulnerable in the past. And or they may be stressed by certain aspects of their current living conditions that make it hard for them to feel safe enough to relax.

Horses are quick to recognise that 1N is inherently very relaxing. So if they are anxious about letting go they may try and avoid the 1N.

Such a horse may refuse to allow any 1N at all, or they may happily do 1N for several minutes but then just as they become drowsy, they start to fidget or resist. Or they may do a whole session very happily but then the following session they fidget or resist.

If your horse shows any of the following behaviours, they may need some extra help before starting 1N

- Fidgets rather than being calm
- Explores and mouths or bites new objects or any objects in the vicinity
- Often stares into the distance as if looking for threats
- Spooky and over reactive to new stimuli, sights and sounds
- Whinnies or neighs when owner arrives and or leaves
- Constantly follows the owner with their eyes and gets anxious if the owner goes out of sight
- Lags behind when led or rushes on ahead rather than staying in position on a loose lead rope
- Requires lots of attention
- Regularly invades the owner's personal space, nudging them for titbits, walking across them, turning the haunches toward them, nippiness etc
- Has difficulty staying focussed in training situations, poor attention span
- Ignores owner's requests and or a slow or erratic response to requests

What to do

Making the horse feel safe enough to allow themselves to START to relax is key. Sometimes it's necessary to convince the horse that they will be safe by showing them that you are willing and competent to be a trustworthy lookout or sentinel while they relax in the 1N.

A surprisingly effective way to do this is with the respond/reward 'Control of Movement' exercises (CoMs).

These are simple exercises but the timing does need to be precise, especially if the horse is in an activated state.



Control of movement exercises (CoMs), consist of asking the horse for a movement using body language and or pressure on the lead rope.

The instant the horse responds the pressure is released and there follows a rest of at least 5 or 10 seconds.

This is repeated several times until the horse synchronises and moves as one with the handler with no need for the lead rope, and fully relaxes in the rest.

CoMs can be done at liberty or on a halter.

CoMs can be done using positive reinforcement so long as the horse is not aroused by food rewards. Getting excited about the idea of a food reward would of course be counterproductive to gaining relaxation.

For our purpose of building a safe space it's just the initial response by the horse that we're interested in. So just one step or even a shift of weight in response to our request is sufficient. We don't want the horse to actually spend time in the new gait/direction.

A common mistake is to continue to ask the horse to move AFTER their initial response so that they end up taking several steps. I've even seen people lunging, thinking that they're doing control of movement exercises. But it's the instant release of the ask on the horse's slightest response and the following rest that create a sense of safety for the horse, rather than continuous movement.

An advantage of this is that CoMs can be done in a confined space, such as a stable or stall.

So it's

Request a movement

Release instantly when the horse responds to the slightest degree

Rest for at least 5 to 10 seconds

Repeat until horse responds and synchronises instantly in the movement and relaxes in the rest

The movement can be anything from your regular handling and or training.

The exercises can be very simple for example

- One step forward or backwards or to the side
- Head down or to the side.

A good test to see if your horse is fully synchronising with you is to stand facing the horse's neck and then step towards the neck. You can try doing this with the intention of continuing to walk when you reach your horse's neck and if synchronised with you then they will turn and shift their shoulders to accompany you. Or you can do it with the intention of stopping at their neck, in which case they won't move.

These response/reward CoMs are a good place to start if your horse is having difficulties starting 1N, whatever the reason for their difficulty.

It's also a good idea to return to CoMs if your horse becomes fidgety during 1N.



New awareness of chronic discomfort

The relaxing effect of 1N can sometimes result in a sudden awareness of existing chronic tension or even pain in their body. Their nervous system may feel the need to DO something about it and this can look like fidgeting, throwing their head around etc.

If the horse feels safe enough to stay with this new awareness, a release of the tension follows and the horse can then enjoy the relief, and relax.

You may have seen this in horses doing bodywork such as the Masterson Method.

What to do

You can help them achieve the release, by being a source of calm confidence. Gently persist with the 1N with a **“You can do this”** energy.

Keeping your mouth closed and not talking will help you. The safer the horse feels, the more quickly they'll get through the fidget and be able to release the tension and find peace.

If the fidgeting is too vigorous to continue the 1N then go to CoMs to provide the safe space for the horse.

Strange Sensations

In some horses, improving the breathing can result quite quickly in strange sensations. Chronic over breathing has direct and damaging effects on the physiology. The body institutes compensations to alleviate these effects and becomes attuned or habituated to functioning in this unhealthy but necessary way. Improvements in the physiology can therefore feel strange and even wrong at first.

One such improvement is an increase in blood circulation in tissues that have been starved of oxygen due to over breathing. This can result in tingling or tickling and can be quite common in headshakers. The horse needs to scratch or rub the tickling.

The horse's physiology may attempt to get back to the unhealthy over breathing equilibrium by coughing, snorting or sneezing to blow off some of the precious and newly replenished carbon dioxide. Even though it's carbon dioxide that will enable the physiology to recover, for some horses moving on from the old, unhealthy equilibrium can be difficult.

We know that humans can have similar responses. They might feel a bit sick, get tickles, cough or giggle or gasp etc.

Physiological changes for the better can occur almost immediately when the breathing starts to be improved. 1N is a very mild form of training, but for some sensitive horses or those with bad over breathing the 1N may need to be very light at the start.

In addition, if the conditions are very hot, some horses may prefer a light 1N training at first.

Remember that Soft Start 1N is lighter and therefore less powerful than regular 1N so the healing it stimulates will be less powerful. The aim is to progress to regular 1N as soon as possible, to help the horse recover effectively.

What to do

Start with CoMs as these are usually helpful in most situations.

Soft Start 1N techniques

There are several Soft Start 1N techniques. You may wish to try them and see which you and your horse prefer.

There's a video of the Soft Start techniques here;

<https://www.equinebreathing.com/how-to-do-it> scroll down to 'Horse not getting it?' section - or click on the thumbnails >>



1. Partial 1N

This is the simplest 'Soft Start' to do. You just leave a gap when you cover the nostril. If the horse has had difficulty with regular 1N, try covering only half the nostril until the horse is fully relaxed.

After a couple of minutes gradually cover a bit more of the nostril, but only if the horse remains relaxed.

If the horse starts to fidget return to the half nostril for a while before gradually reducing the gap once more.

partial 1N



block the out
breath only

2. 'Out only' 1N

This second technique is probably even more relaxing, but requires a bit more coordination.

You have to watch and listen to the horse's breathing to identify the in and out breaths, and then cover the nostril completely but **ONLY FOR THE OUT BREATH.**

Open your hand away to release the nostril completely for the in breath.

The horse's breathing may be quite variable to begin with but try to follow their pattern and try not to block the in breath at all.

If possible continue to block the out breath through any irregularities of the breathing and even through snorts. This is not always easy!

At some point his/her breathing will become more rhythmic and less strong and then s/he will relax nicely.

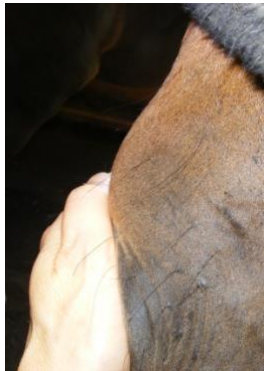
Once s/he has achieved this better state for a couple of minutes you can start to keep your hand over the nostril for the start of the in breath.

When s/he remains relaxed through this then you can gradually work towards keeping the nostril fully covered through the in breath as well as the out – in other words, regular 1N.

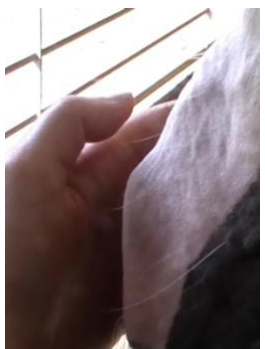
But if s/he finds it difficult at any time, return to covering the out breath only.

These Soft Start methods are likely to be ineffective if the horse's difficulty with 1N involves worry about relaxing. This is partly why it's usually best to do the respond / reward CoMs first. Then try regular 1N which tends to be more effective more quickly than soft start 1N.

Only turn to Soft Start if the horse is still finding 1N difficult after good CoMs.



release for
the in breath



Other tips

Walking the horse between attempts at 1N or soft start 1N can help a horse to relax. It stimulates metabolism which can help relieve strange sensations and just the act of walking can be calming.

Combining the walking with CoMs makes the walking even more effective.

Hot conditions make it harder for a horse to reduce their over breathing. This is because horses use increased breathing to cool themselves. Ideally it's best to start 1N in cool or moderate conditions but if this is not practical then wet the horse or use a fan or mister to cool them.

If necessary use the soft start 1N

Use of glove or towel. If you have a big horse with large nostrils, and your hands are not big enough to adequately cover them, you can use a glove or a towel.

And as described in the 1N instructions, for your first attempts at 1N make sure the horse is in conditions that are most relaxing for them, eg with their friends, quiet surroundings, and with relief from fly worry or any other irritation and so on.

You may like to do some relaxing bodywork such as [Jim Masterson's TMJ release](#)

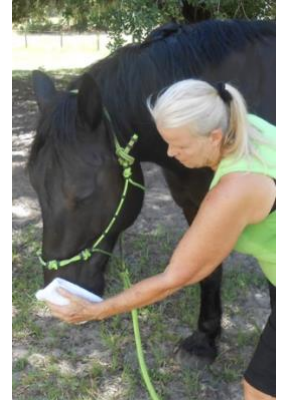


So to summarise, the best place to start is with the respond/reward CoMs.

If necessary go on to use the Soft Start techniques too.

The aim is relaxation so let your horse be your guide and progress through the Soft Start 1N techniques at your horse's preferred rate until s/he is able to fully enjoy and benefit from regular 1N.

Denise LaCroix with her 17.2h
Percheron x Quarterhorse,
Titan



[If you have any questions
please ask](#)

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