

Senior Horse Management



With today’s medical advances, research and improved horse management, horses are living longer and longer lives! In previous years, many horses were considered old when in their late teens. However, these days, it is not unusual to see a horse live into its late twenties or thirties, allowing us to spend plenty of quality time with our equine senior citizens. Proper management can prove the golden rule to ensuring your horse remains happy and comfortable into his golden years.

Routine Care

Even though your elderly horse may be retired or have a decreased workload, it is important to ensure that he still receives routine care. Give your horse a daily once over to check for any new or worsening problems such as cuts or lameness. Make sure he stays well groomed and has his hooves cleaned regularly. Your horse should be seen routinely by both the veterinarian and farrier, whether he is in work or not.

Health Check

Much like people, elderly horses are often more susceptible to health problems. It is important to keep seniors up to date on vaccinations and schedule an annual or bi-annual check-up with your veterinarian. Prevention is the best cure!

Older horses are prone to problems such as Equine Metabolic Syndrome (also known as Cushings). Many older horses also suffer from pain due to arthritis – if possible, keep them moving around by extending their turn out time. Any discomfort or pain should be addressed by a veterinarian who can suggest treatment options.

Dentistry

Older horses have special needs for routine dental care. Senior horses will need their teeth floated every 6 months or every year. If your horse has dental problems, he will not be able to gain proper nutrition from his food. Some elderly horses may have little or no teeth at all, so special care must be taken to make sure they are well fed.

Nutrition

Feeding the senior horse can be a challenging task! Some seniors have difficulty keeping weight on, while others go up a girth size at the sight of grass. It is important to develop a diet that meets your horse’s individual needs. Many feed companies have developed feeds specifically for the senior horse. As always, when planning a diet you should speak to your veterinarian and make any dietary changes slowly.

What age is old?

The saying “you’re only as old as you feel” certainly applies to horses. Some horses may be considered elderly at 15, while others are still actively ridden at 25. As always, it is important to look at the horse as an individual and consult with your veterinarian.



This 18 year old pony has retired from upper level eventing but is still used for pleasure and trail riding.

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