

Taking Your Horse's Pulse and Respiration

One of the best ways of assessing your horse's level of fitness is by checking his pulse and respiration before, during and following exercise. These readings are simple to perform and can be taken anywhere, with or without a stethoscope.



Counting the number of breaths per minute can be done in a number of ways: (1) by placing the stethoscope against the throat, part way down the front of the neck; (2) by watching the nostrils flare (difficult in a resting horse); (3) by watching the flank move with each inhalation and exhalation (below). Count the "ins" only (or the "outs"), not both. Average in a resting horse is 8-15 breaths per minute.



The most efficient method of taking a horse's pulse is by using a stethoscope (left), which is a very useful addition to any horse owner's medical supply kit (handy for listening to gut sounds too).

Nestle the bell firmly into the horse's left armpit, and count the beats per minute. If the horse is very fidgety, you can count the beats for 15 seconds and multiply by four (less accurate). An adult horse's normal resting heartbeat is 32-44 beats per minute.

You can feel for a pulse by lightly pressing your fingertips against the facial artery in the lower jaw (above) or on the digital artery in the inside of the foreleg (right). Never use your thumb for this, as it has a pulse of its own which could confuse the reading.



It is a good idea to record the resting pulse and respiration rates for your horse, to quickly be able to assess any abnormalities if he is sick. Also, when conditioning your horse, the sooner these values return to normal after exercise, the more fit he is.