

Get That Horse Some Factor 50 And A Sunshade Please....

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Seriously though - people seem to assume horses will be fine in summer and only worry about winter, but horses overheat easily.

I was walking my dog early this morning to avoid the heat and I noticed a field of lovely horses of all different varieties, shapes and sizes, all clustered under one small tree. It was already getting warmer and on closer inspection (in fact I scoured the whole field) they were doing their best to stay cool because the water supply they had was totally inadequate.

Now taking aside the care of these particular horses (which I can assure you I will be dealing with...) I wondered how many other well meaning owners were assuming their horses were ok in summer?

Dogs, cats, and even horses with sparse hair and light colored hair and skin are more susceptible to sun related diseases. Sunburn is painful in animals just as in people, and it is recommended to keep your pet or horse out of the sun especially during the summer from 10 am to 4 pm. Horses can be protected in a barn ; even a shade tree can really help. But the point is that they do need some protection from the sun.

There are numerous cancers that can affect the skin of animals and most are related to sun exposure. Sunscreen can be used on animals but may be difficult to use in a haired area. Also, you must be careful your pet does not lick the sunscreen as it could be hazardous. There are even sun suits available for your pet to prevent skin exposure, although the pet may get hot in these or may chew them off. So there really is no substitute for providing them with the proper environmental conditions.

The single most important way to counter the impact of hot weather is to give horses free access to clean, fresh water. Like humans, horses control their temperature through sweating. However, this can lead to dehydration if the water and minerals aren't promptly replenished.

The safest solution is to install plenty of troughs and keep them full, as shallow water is sometimes hard to reach for smaller horses or ponies. Choosing self-filling troughs is the easiest, though costliest, option, as long as owners ensure the water is clean and that horses are drinking it.

A number of experts also advocate turning horses out in the evening and keeping them stabled in the day during summer, to minimise exposure to blazing sun and flies. This only works if the stables are cool and well ventilated, otherwise they can quickly become furnace-like. So enclosing them in a really airless wooden stable isn't the answer; they will just as easily fry in there – unless of course its brick or concrete which are much cooler. All this calls for is a bit of common sense – if you would get hot closed in there then so will they.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that you may also be unaware that there is another potentially serious condition in horses that can easily be confused with straight forward sunburn, and that's Photosensitization.

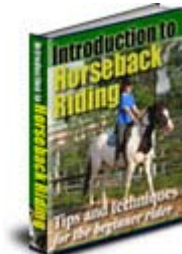
Photosensitization is a potentially serious skin condition characterized by sunburned, crusty skin that can die and slough away. It is usually caused by a reaction to something the horse has eaten, but the skin problem doesn't appear until the horse is exposed to sunlight. Three factors contribute to the development of photosensitization: -Presence of a photoactivating substance in the skin; -Exposure to UV light; and -Lack of skin pigment which enables more light to penetrate the skin.

Removal from the sun should provide immediate relief. Exposure to the sun causes a chemical reaction in the skin which can be painful. Affected horses can be turned out at night and housed out of direct sunlight during the day.

Recovery can be a prolonged process depending on the extent of skin damage and loss.

Many horses with light skin can get sunburned. If your horse develops severe skin lesions after exposure to the sun, it's always wise to seek advice from your veterinarian to find out the cause the cause.

Humans are constantly reminded by dermatologists about exposure to the sun and the risk of skin damage and cancer. Although you may not have ever considered it before, our pets can also be susceptible to diseases related to excessive sun exposure. So next time you see an animal that is not sufficiently protected, have a care, and even at the risk of some verbal abuse, let the owner know (as diplomatically as possible) that they could do better.



Roger Bourdon is the author of "Introduction to Horseback Riding" and owner of the site www.anyhorsebackriding.com. If you are interested in horse riding, then sign up for Roger's free mini course and news letters at www.anyhorsebackriding.com