

# Equine Vital Signs

The Educated Horseman: Health Series



## Temperature



normal adult average at rest  
**99-101.5** degrees Fahrenheit

call your veterinarian if temperature is more than **102°F**

### How to take a horse's temperature:

The most accurate way to take a horse's temperature is rectally. Always secure a string to the end of the thermometer so it doesn't get lost.



## Pulse

normal adult  
**35-40**  
beats/minute

**How to take a pulse:** The facial artery can be found at the bottom side of the jaw where it crosses over the bone. Count the beats for 15 seconds and multiply by four to achieve beats per minute.

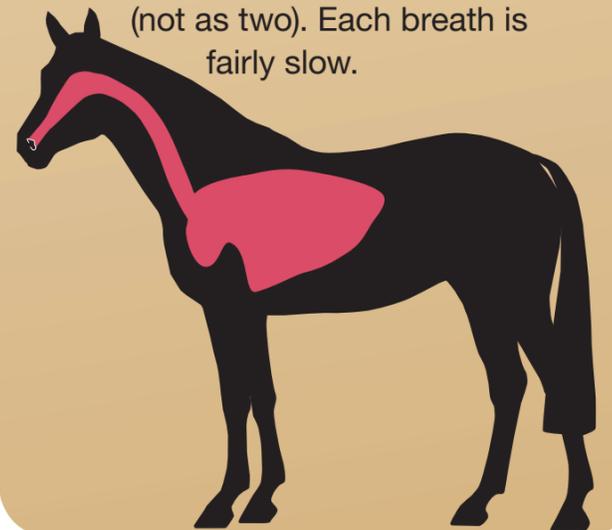
## Respiration

normal adult at rest  
**8-15**  
breaths/minute

Respiration rate increases with hot or humid weather, exercise, fever or pain. **Rapid breathing at rest should receive veterinary attention.**

### How to take the respiration rate:

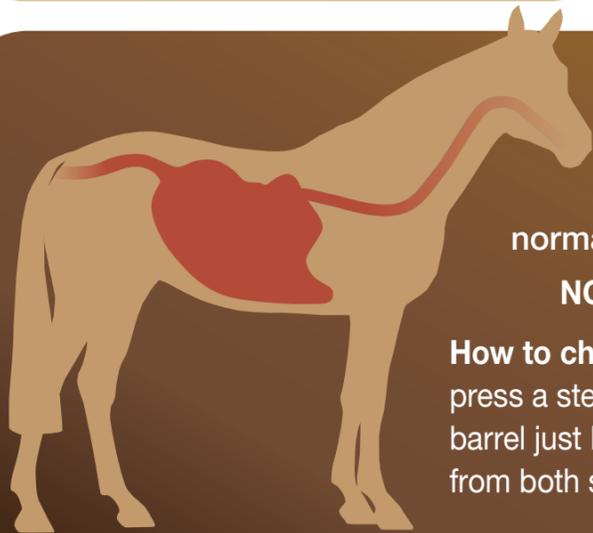
Watch or feel horse's ribcage/belly for one minute. Be sure to count one inhale and one exhale as one breath (not as two). Each breath is fairly slow.



## Gut Sounds

normal **3-4** gurgling sounds per minute  
**NO SOUNDS** contact your veterinarian

**How to check for gut sounds:** To check for gut sounds, press a stethoscope or your ear up against your horse's barrel just behind its last rib. Be sure to check gut sounds from both sides.



## Dehydration

Pinch Test: skin flattens back in  
**less than 1 second**

**How to perform a pinch test:** Pinch the skin on your horse's neck. It is normal if the skin flattens back into place in less than one second when you let go. If it doesn't flatten out that quickly, that means your horse isn't drinking enough water and may be dehydrated.

**Horses drink a minimum of 5 gallons of water per day.** Horses

drink more water in hot weather and when there is excessive loss of water in the horse's body due to strenuous exercise.



## Capillary Refill Time

normal refill time  
**1-2 seconds**

**How to check capillary refill time:** Lift your horse's upper lip up and firmly press your thumb against its gums for two seconds to create a white mark. This white mark should return to the normal pink color within one to two seconds after you release the pressure. This is another indication of hydration.



## Mucous Membranes

normal healthy gums  
**moist, pale pink**

**How to check mucous membranes:** Lift your horse's upper lip up and observe its gums.

Gum colors that indicate health concerns:  
**very pale** . . . fever, blood loss or anemia  
**bright red** . . . toxicity or mild shock  
**gray** . . . . . severe shock, depression and illness  
**yellow** . . . . . liver problems

The Educated Horseman: Health Series | [www.LSUAgCenter.com/Horses](http://www.LSUAgCenter.com/Horses)

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