

In Practice

Overbreathing signs in people

Horses and humans that breathe more than is optimal tend to worsen their breathing to match the breathing pattern of the worst breather around them. If you are over breathing you may be inadvertently detracting from your efforts to improve your horse's breathing pattern. So it is useful to be aware of your own breathing pattern.

You can assess yourself by looking in the mirror and or placing a hand on your chest. If you detect movement in your chest, neck, or back when at rest, you are using these muscles to breathe and are over breathing. Similarly if you can hear your own breathing.

If you breathe through your mouth at any time at rest or in gentle exercise, or because of a blocked nose, then you over breathe. Mouth breathing causes a third more air to enter the lungs than does nose breathing. Many people are unaware that they mouth breathe at all or when they do it.

If you want to get more technical you can test yourself as follows. Take a normal breath in, a normal breath out and pause until you feel the first slight hunger for air then commence normal breathing again.

If you gasp you have pushed the pause too long. Time the pause. The WHO standard for optimal breathing equates to a pause of 60 seconds. Most people these days have a pause of around 10 seconds which means they are breathing about 6 times too much air!

Chronic conditions such as asthma, hay fever, allergies, arthritis, ME etc are likely to be caused by chronic over breathing. Other signs of over breathing are;

sighs often	'forget to breathe' and have to gasp
yawns frequently	feeling breathless
coughing or sneezing fits	talk incessantly
dry mouth first thing in the morning	sharp breath intake on starting sentence
food cravings	mouth breathing
smoking and other addictions	sleeping on back
anxiety, difficulty relaxing	generally fatigued or tire easily
pmt or menopause symptoms	poor sleep
unreasonable anger	blocked nose
depression	polyps in nose
headaches	prone to infections (colds and worse)
weight gain	poor circulation, feeling the cold
gum disorders	dry skin, skin conditions
candida or athlete foot infections	gut disorders, constipation

and any of the horse over breathing signs listed in 'Horse Breather' no.4 that translate to people!

If you find that you are over breathing, you can reduce its affect on your horse as follows;

- stop talking when you are with them (communication with horses, as you know is through body language so you will not lose touch with them, people often find it brings a closer contact),
- keep your mouth shut,
- be aware of what happens to your heart rate and breathing when you get anxious, irate or fearful, and maybe start to raise your voice - and then calm yourself,
- be aware of what happens to your breathing when you exert yourself (eg open mouth or even panting), and rest or slow down until you have control of your breathing and can nose breathe again,

When you are Equine Breathing stand so that your diaphragm is free to work ie evenly on both legs with pelvis horizontal and spine relaxed and upright, chest and shoulders relaxed.

Gently quieten your breathing.

Contents

In Practice

Over breathing signs in people

FAQs

Answers for commonly asked questions

'Why does my horse so quickly relax from even highly agitated states when I start doing Equine Breathing'?

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'Why does my horse so quickly relax from even highly agitated states when I start doing Equine Breathing'?

A horse that is agitated or showing any of the symptoms listed in '[Horse Breather](#)' no. 4 is likely to be over breathing. At some earlier point the horse may have been stressed either physiologically (eg eating rich food, overheating etc) or emotionally (had a fright, friend taken away, shut in a stable etc) which triggered the over breathing. Over breathing increases adrenaline production which puts the horse into the catabolic 'flight or fight' state of arousal. In this state the body's physiology is changed in many ways in order to channel maximum resources into muscle function. One effect in people is that adrenaline causes feelings of anxiety and restlessness which help focus the body to flee for its life for example!

Adrenaline also stimulates a further increase in breathing so a vicious cycle builds up. The over breathing becomes chronic and makes it difficult for the horse to come out of the adrenalised catabolic state. If the horse is not producing much carbon dioxide because they are inactive, the effect is even worse.

Equine Breathing seems to break the vicious cycle by raising carbon dioxide levels which affect the sleep centre, causing drowsiness. Adrenaline production is cut down and with it the feelings of anxiety. Imagine what a relief it must be to feel calm and relaxed after months or even years of being anxious!

With lower adrenaline levels the breathing can be reduced and maintained (for a while) at lower levels and the horse remains outside the catabolic state in the relaxed 'anabolic state'. This is characterised by lower heart rate, lower breathing rate, increased cell growth, repair and replacement and immune system cell production (= healing). For good health it is essential that the body spends time in the anabolic state.

In evolutionarily 'normal' situations, the catabolic state would be short lived. The horse is frightened, increases breathing, produces adrenaline, gallops enough to increase carbon dioxide levels and the chronic over breathing cycle is not started. However, I guess that many of our horses are in prolonged catabolic (adrenalised) states and some are exhausted by this continual stimulation but it may only show when the stimulant (ie adrenaline) is removed.

The first time you Equine Breathe the increasing levels of carbon dioxide work directly on the physiology to break the vicious cycle and allow the anabolic state. But as with any training, repetitive sessions enable the horse to anticipate the pleasant feelings associated with Equine Breathing. Soon Equine Breathing will be even more powerful in times of extra stress (such as travelling etc) because the horse expects to go into a relaxed state.

In some cases where the horse feels that it has to be the leader, it can actually be frightened to let go and enjoy relaxation, but that's another FAQ.....

"Wahayyyy! Reduce your breathing and get your kicks!" – Brown (aged 29)

