

Happy Holidays! As we come to the end of 2012 I would like to thank everyone for a great first year. I enjoy having the opportunity to care for your horses and be a part of your lives. I plan to continue the monthly newsletters and frequent clinics in 2013. As always, I welcome your input and recommendations to make every part of Roaring Brook Veterinary Service better and more able to suit your needs. Thanks again for a wonderful year and have a safe and happy holiday season!



WINTER HORSE CARE



Caring for your horse can be a little confusing and a bit difficult, especially in frigid northern New York. Remember that although our horses are very special to us, they are horses and are quite capable of tolerating cold temperatures.

Feeding Modifications:

As the weather cools, animals' caloric requirements increase. Horses have a thermal neutral zone, in which their body starts requiring more energy (calories) to function. This varies based on hair coat.

Wet or short – 60 F; Medium – 50 F; Long – 30 F

For every decrease in degree below the thermal neutral zone, there is a one percent increase in caloric needs. For example, if a 1000lb horse with a heavy winter coat is normally consuming 15lbs of hay per day (minimum recommended normal maintenance), and the temperature drops to 20F the horse would now need 16.5lbs. Remember this is simply maintenance of normal activity and these values change with wind chill and whether the horse is wet. Adding a 10mph wind chill will increase hay requirements 5lbs/day and rain will increase hay requirements 6lbs/day. This is why often horses are put on grain (or increase grain) in winter, because they are unable to consume enough calories with hay alone.

Along with changing feed is monitoring water intake. Horses tend to decrease their intake of water, but there needs increase due to the increased forage consumption. This is why impaction colic is more common in winter. Supplying a free-choice mineral or salt block will help increase intake. Remember to check water buckets for ice and, if able, add de-icers to help maintain and more preferable water temperature.

Shelter and Air Quality:

All horses should have at least a three-sided shelter for protection against the elements. Often owners choose to keep the horses stabled more during winter; however this is wrought with problems. Horses allowed to exercise throughout the day are healthier and less likely to colic. Also air quality is a major factor in stabling, especially during winter months. Stables should be managed around horse care and unfortunately not human care. It is better to have a cooler, fresher air and have to wear an additional jacket, than deal with poor air quality. Closing a barn completely allows for an accumulation of urine ammonia, endotoxin particulates from manure, dust, and molds from hay and bedding. Ammonia can destroy the epithelial lining of the respiratory system and contribute to respiratory diseases such as inflammatory airway disease and heaves. When assessing the air quality in the barn one must be sure to evaluate the stalls, not the just the alleyways, because the ammonia is often concentrated at ground levels in the stalls. If you can smell ammonia it is too much. Recommended ammonia levels are less than 10ppm, but the human nose doesn't detect it until 20ppm. There are also testing kits available for ammonia testing.

Blanketing:

A horse's best defense is a proper hair coat. If their lifestyle allows it (heavy training and working may require clipping), they should be allowed to grow a thick winter coat. A blanket may be necessary under several conditions; clipped hair coat, improper shelter, wet coat, older horse, or improper winter coat growth. If a horse is shivering at any time they need additional coverage. Blankets should be checked frequently for rips and dryness, and check to make sure your horse is not too warm.

Hoof Care and Exercise:

If a horse isn't being worked heavily outside then shoes should be removed. Normal shoes can be slippery and cause snowballs to build up on the bottoms of feet. Regular hoof maintenance (trimming) can often be decreased from every 8 weeks to at least every 12 weeks. If shoeing is necessary, use the proper shoes with traction and most likely snow pads will be necessary. When turning horses out, be careful of rough frozen ground that can easily bruise their feet and slippery ground that can lead to devastating accidents. Gravel, sand, kitty litter and ice salt can be used to aid in traction.

Exercise through the winter is important for intestinal motility as well as general fitness and health. Also remember when exercising in winter take time to properly cool down your horse. Wool coolers and walking after exercise will help to cool down and dry their sweaty coat. Horses can quickly chill after a strenuous work out which can lead to muscle cramping and illness.