

DRESSAGE TODAY

VOL. 40

EXTRA

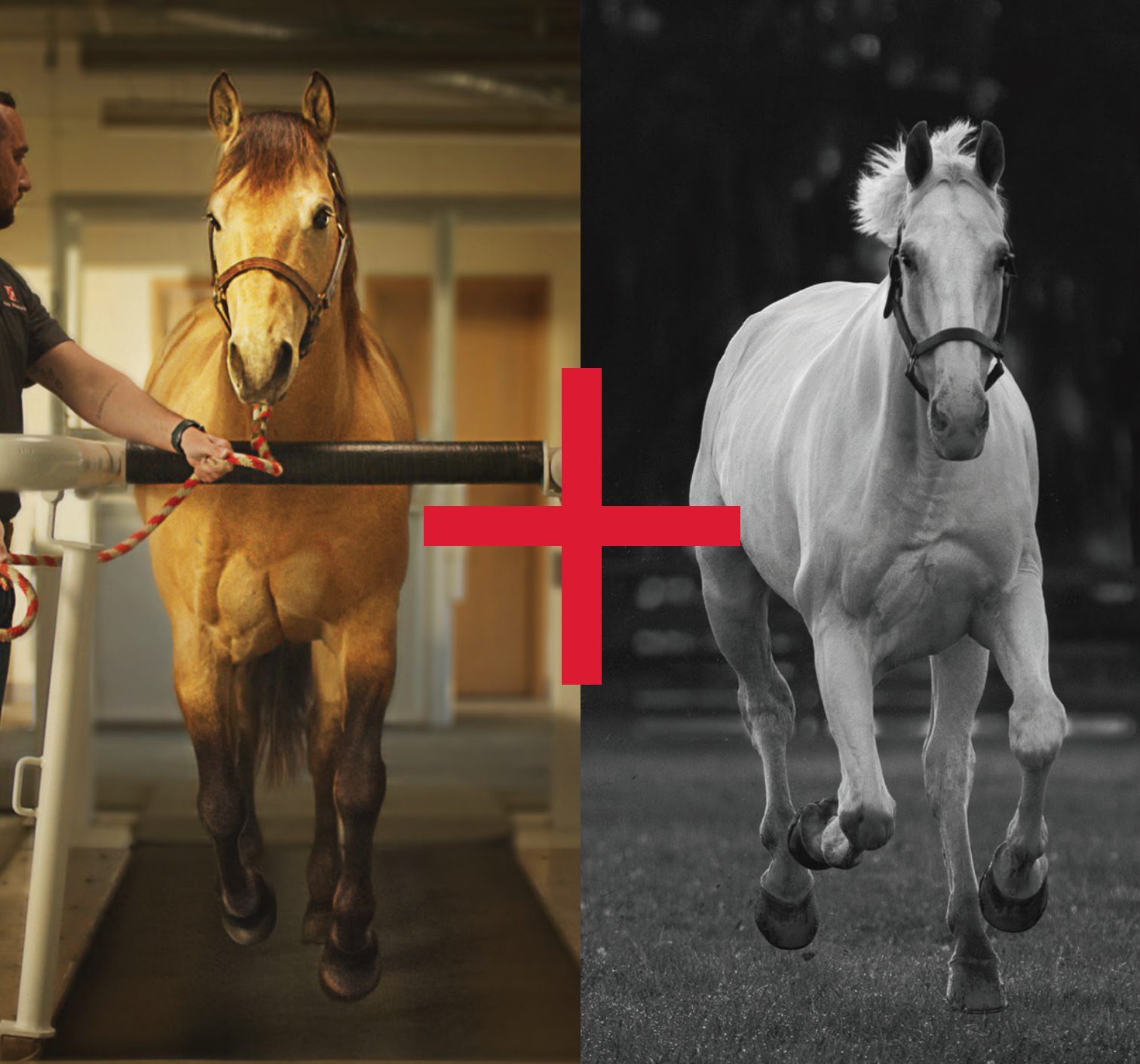
How to Ride the Half Halt

**Expert Tips for
Healthy Horse
Keeping**

Brought to you by



FEED GREATNESS®



Science + Love. Helping Horses Thrive.

Our Purina PhD Nutritionists tackle problems using science. And our love of horses keeps us at it until we get it right. Even with our most established feeds, we keep innovating. Even when it takes years of research, we don't stop until it's right. We're dedicated to the scientific method, but it can't capture the feeling of seeing a horse reach their full potential. It takes science and love to help your horse live their best life.

Put our research to the test at HorseInnovation.com



FEED GREATNESS®

How to Ride the Half Halt

By Jan Ebeling with Annie Morris

In dressage our goal is to improve the horse's ability to carry the rider's weight by making him stronger behind. When the horse carries more weight behind, he lowers his croup, lifts his back and elevates his forehand. That's when you see that beautiful outline when the horse is put together in collection.

The way you achieve this is by giving the horse two opposing commands. You give the aids that tell him to go forward and at the same time give the aids to restrain him. The correct combination of aids will put the horse in balance and on the bit. That is your half halt, a combination of forward aids and restricting aids. The driving aids are your



Arnd Bronkhorst - arnd.nl

The half halt, a combination of forward aids and restricting aids, doesn't just slow the horse down. Each half halt could be used to improve the horse's frame, change the tempo, engage the hind legs or rebalance the horse. Here Jan Ebeling rides the Oldenburg mare Rafalka.

●●●●● tips from trainers who teach

leg and your seat, and the restricting aids are the rein aids. The half halt always finishes when you release all your aids.

Half Halts Explained

To begin understanding the half halt, think of slowing the horse down, and as soon as he slows down, speeding him up again. Then you get a sense of using not only the rein aids but also the seat and leg aids. However, the half halt doesn't just slow the horse down. Each half halt could be used to improve the horse's frame, change the tempo, engage the hind legs or rebalance the horse. For example, every corner you do, every figure you ride, every transition you make and every time you bend the horse, it all starts and ends with a half halt. It is a tool that solves many problems and works on many different levels.

You need to ride half halts constantly. Sometimes you must be stronger, sometimes you must be more persistent, but developing the correct timing and strength requires quite a bit of feel on the rider's part and quite a bit of training on the horse's part as well. The more trained the horse is, the better he can respond to those signals you give him.

Novice riders will sometimes find half halts difficult to understand because they are such small aids, but they are extremely important ones. The biggest mistake I see in the half halt is too much rein aid with the driving aids completely forgotten. If this occurs, the horse becomes stiffer, heavier and harder to stop.

The Aids

Think of your aids like the pedals in a manual car:

The brake. To use the rein aid for the half halt, feel your hand squeezing the water out of a wet sponge, holding onto a dry sponge or a feeling in between the two.

The gas. In the moment you are squeezing with the hand, you apply more

pressure with the legs. Imagine sitting on one of those big exercise balls you find at the gym. You squeeze the ball a bit with the leg. That is about the right amount of pressure applied to the horse.

The clutch. The seat always has a forward-driving effect on the horse. Use the seat like a clutch to coordinate between the restricting and the forward-driving aids. When you feel the horse respond, you back off and release the aids. Even if the horse doesn't respond, you back off then give another half halt.

The art is knowing how much rein, seat and leg to use. The amount changes

To use the rein aid for the half halt, feel your hand squeezing the water out of a wet sponge, holding onto a dry sponge or a feeling between the two.

from moment to moment. Some horses are sensitive and don't need a whole lot while other horses need more. However, there is never a long pull back or shove of the horse forward. The half halt is always a relatively short aid, so sometimes you need a succession of several half halts and many releases to get the response that you are asking for.

Try This

The best exercise for half halts is transitions. Start with simple transitions such as trot-walk-trot. From the working trot, do a transition to six steps of medium walk and immediately trot again. Then try four steps of walk and two steps of walk. When that is easy, from the trot do a transition almost to walk but right before you feel that the horse is about to walk you already push him forward again into the trot.

When you have the feeling that this "almost walk transition" works, try to prolong that moment of almost walking

for two to five steps before returning to the working trot. You don't want the horse to fall to walk or run off in the trot for these steps. You will feel the combination of the driving and restraining aids to maintain those small trot steps. Then you have developed control of how much forward or how little forward the horse goes, which is your basic half halt. 🐾

Jan Ebeling immigrated to the United States in 1984, after growing up in Germany and apprenticing with the late German master Herbert Rehbein for many years. He has competed for the U.S. in several World Cup Finals and in the 2012 Olympics with the mare Rafalca. Ebeling conducts clinics nationally and internationally and has a full training and sales business in Wellington, Florida. His family is an important part of his life and he enjoys spending time hiking, biking, snorkeling and traveling with his wife, Amy, and their son, Ben.





Expert Tips for Healthy Horsekeeping

Dressage riders with everyday access to veterinary expertise share their strategies.

By Kim F. Miller

As a dressage rider, being a veterinarian or being married to one seems to offer an unfair advantage in the daily effort of maintaining a happy, healthy, peak-performing equine partner. Not many fit that description, but Dressage Today found five who were happy to share their strategies for things all owners can do or provide for their steeds.

“The first and most important thing for everyone to remember is that horses, just like people, are individuals,” notes Melanie Burnley, DVM, a veterinarian



Amy K. Drago

Low-impact movement promotes healthy joints.

and Grand Prix competitor. “The most important thing that a rider can do is get to know her horse as an individual and then treat him as such. Everything else is just suggestions.” Burnley and her husband and fellow FEI trainer and rider, JT Burnley, own Wrenwood Dressage in Fulton, Kentucky.

No “cake-baking” in the feed room, “psyllium Sundays” and a stimulating stable life are among the practices most owners can incorporate into their horses’ daily routine. Read on for more expert ideas on fitness, nutrition and maintaining digestive, joint and respiratory health, plus tips for healthy stable keeping.

Fitness

“Never let horses get completely out of work,” recommends Carolyn Simmelink, DVM, who juggles her Redding, Connecticut, practice with keeping and riding two horses at home. Her herd consists of a senior “possibly Trakehner” she rescued and competed through Novice level eventing, and a younger Connemara/Thoroughbred cross who events at Beginner Novice. Both also do lots of dressage. Downtime from the show circuit is great, says Simmelink, but it should include regular physical activity and work. With the exception of the few horses who give themselves a good workout during turn-

out time, she suggests at least two days a week of deliberate exercise even during time off from regular work. Twice-weekly work is required to maintain muscle, she notes, and four times a week is needed to build it.

For Simmelink, a Northeasterner without an indoor ring, that often means jumping on her horses bareback and riding up and down the driveway in the snow. “It’s a half-mile driveway on a hill, so it’s great conditioning while also providing something completely different from arena work.

“It doesn’t have to be dedicated training work,” she continues. “Forty-five minutes of walking will do or 20 minutes of refresher exercise like transitions. The horses just need to be reminded of how their muscles need to move and what’s expected of them.

“I think it’s really healthy for the horse to do trail riding, get out of the ring or do some gymnastics or small jumps inside the arena. People are afraid of things like that and always want to work in perfectly groomed rings. If the horse has never seen uneven terrain or, heaven forbid, a bit of a dip in the arena, he won’t know how to handle it.”

She notes that riders in England are known for trotting horses on hard-surface roads for a few minutes as part

of their daily conditioning program, a practice proven to strengthen bones. If you decide to incorporate road work into your program, Simmelink stresses that riders should start the practice gradually if the horse is new to it or get creative with other ways to mix up the routine. “Some variety is good, mentally and physically,” Simmelink says. “If they do the same thing on the same footing, they don’t know how to adapt to other circumstances. Horses are amazingly adaptable if we prepare them for what their body is going to have to do.”

Correct training is critical to fitness and soundness, notes veterinarian and amateur rider Sara Bartholomew, DVM, whose mobile practice, Capitol Equine Veterinary Services, is based in Sacramento, California. “As an amateur, it takes six times as long as a professional to produce the same result in terms of collection and throughness,” she says. She makes a point of lessoning during the four days a week her rounds enable her to ride, but she also has both her horses in full training with trainer Rachel Wade. “Soundness is hugely related to correct riding,” she explains. “Just like weightlifting on the human side, it’s important to have a professional help us along the way.” Full training also ensures that Bartholomew’s horses get worked well



Quality forage is a nutritional priority.

and regularly when she can't ride herself, a frequent occurrence given the demands of her profession.

Nutrition & Digestion

Good-quality forage is a feeding priority. "From there, decide if your horse needs additional nutrition," says Simmelink. "Everybody thinks of grain when they think nutrition, but it should start with hay." Appropriate body weight, muscle condition and coat quality are the main indicators of sufficient nutrition. A 5 score on the Body Condition Scoring System is ideal in her view. She acknowledges that many dressage owners prefer the look of 7s and 8s, even though that's less healthy. Ribs that can be felt but not seen characterize a 5 while the "fleshy" and "fat" 7 and 8 scale-points include enough fat to feel it between the ribs, possible fat deposits near the withers and/or a crease along the spine of fleshy hindquarters. "Equine metabolic syndrome is almost an epidemic among horses, on par with heart disease in people," she notes. "Keeping the Body Conditioning Score lower helps with that." A little extra weight on an older, retired horse is OK, she adds, because it counters winter weight dips that are typi-

cal in that equine demographic.

If grain is called for to add weight, it should be small amounts fed frequently, not large amounts all at once, and preferably with low-carbohydrate but high-fat content. Large amounts of carbohydrate-rich grains are a culprit in ulcers and other gut problems, she says.

"Psyllium Sunday" is a mnemonic phrase Simmelink uses to remind clients of the benefits of a weekly dose of the fiber supplement. "It's a colic preventive, a great prebiotic that feeds the good gut bacteria we like and also treats sand colic." Sand colic, she says, is a threat any time horses uproot grass, not just for those grazing in areas with lots of sand in the soil. Reaching under a fence rail to get that distant blade of grass, for example, often results in a horse ingesting equal parts dirt and grass.

In her Northeast neck of the woods, frequent weather changes often lead to erratic water consumption and psyllium helps address that by drawing fluid into the gut.

Living in California, Bartholomew also advocates simple supplementation. Caring for horses who range from backyard buddies to upper-level dressage stallions, "I lecture my clients that if you

feel like you are baking a cake in the feed room, you are probably overdoing it." Risks of oversupplementation range from spending more money than is necessary to unknowingly increasing an ingredient like selenium that can be toxic in large quantities. Selenium is one of many minerals that should be, but are not always, available in hay. It varies by region and type of hay. So if you don't know how much of it is in your hay, it's impossible to know how much is building up in your horse's system. Most important, she says, is knowing what's in the supplements you are feeding.

She, too, asserts that good-quality forage is the most important dietary component. Knowing what is in hay is key to savvy supplementation. Testing hay samples, drawn from the middle of a bale, can determine how much digestible fiber, protein and carbohydrates it contains. "If your horse is a little too fat or too thin, has insulin resistance or another condition, you can make adjustments," Bartholomew notes.

Testing hay makes sense for those with control over the source and consistency of their horses' feed. Many owners don't have that luxury. "When you can't know the nutritional quality of the hay or are getting poor or erratic quality of hay, that's when you might need to add more supplements or go to a pelleted feed," Simmelink explains.

Joints

Maximum low-impact movement throughout the day is the best joint health approach for horses in every stage of life, says California FEI rider and trainer Tiffany Silverman, who is married to Mark Silverman, DVM, MS. "Ample time to move around is probably the most critical part of our program," says Silverman, who placed ninth overall in the Intermediaire I National Championships at Gladstone with her Oldenburg, Sebastian, in the summer of 2017.

Horses in her training business, Un-



Trailing poses challenges for the respiratory system. Opening windows and vents in the trailer and taking frequent stops to let the horse get out and lower his head will help reduce respiratory risks.

bridled, Ltd., work five days a week and get two days off from formal training. If turnout or Eurociser (similar to a hot walker, but the horse is confined by gates rather than tied to an overhead spoke of the machine) time is not an option, she recommends hand-walking for as long as possible to increase low-impact movement. Although time-consuming, it has the bonus of bond-building between horse and rider while loosening up the rider's muscles and joints, too.

Icing is also a big part of Silverman's program. After cooling down from a work-out, a horse is likely to receive a 20-minute session to cool the tendons and sometimes the hocks.

As her horses reach riding age, they get regular Adequan® injections. It's the cheapest insurance policy, and joint health is something you have to get ahead of, the rider explains. "We recommend it for horses who are doing any significant level of work. A Legend® dose before competitions provides a little extra lubrication, too."

Loosening joints before working out is important to their long-term health. Cavalletti set at a walk distance (about 40 inches apart) is a pre-schooling favorite the rider learned from German dressage master Conrad Schumacher.

Respiratory

"The real limiting factor in performance

is the respiratory system," says Burnley of an often-overlooked component of horse health. "As a trainer, I can condition the heart and the muscles constantly, but the respiratory system does not get fitter with training. The lungs don't get better with exercise. That's why we must protect the respiratory system so fervently."

Most young horses go through a phase dominated by infectious respiratory issues, much like children do upon entering preschool or day care, she notes. "As horses get older, allergies and irritants cause the respiratory system to deteriorate." Dust particles brought into the barn in hay and bedding are major culprits.

Respiratory diseases look different in horses than in people, she continues. "Horses are less likely to cough than people with respiratory problems. Oftentimes all we see is an increased respiratory rate and effort at rest. We must look closely at our horses in their stalls when they are not excited to notice this."

Travel is a particularly high-risk time. Stress, closed spaces with poor ventilation and dehydration are contributing factors. So is the horse's inability to lower his head when trailing, which is part of nature's design for clearing inhaled material from his airways. Opening windows and vents in the trailer and taking frequent stops to let the horse get out and lower his head will help reduce respiratory

risks. If traveling with the trailer's front windows open, put a fly mask on your horse for protection against bugs and other objects.

Multiple studies confirm that stable-air quality is a major factor in respiratory health, she continues. An outdoor lifestyle is ideal, but there are several ways to improve indoor air quality for that high percentage of the equine population that spends much of its life inside the barn.

Rubber stall mats decrease the need for bedding and the dust that comes with it. "Clean them regularly. If you smell ammonia, it's at a level that's irritating to a horse's airway." Dampen shavings slightly if they are extremely dusty, Burnley adds, and remove the horse from the stall while cleaning it.

Clean hay is also key. Even good-quality forage can have big quantities of respirable particles in it. The Burnleys' horses, including FEI mounts Fuerst Falco and Furst Tanzer, get forage that's been steamed to 212 degrees Fahrenheit in a Haygain® hay steamer. It keeps the hay as clean as possible and significantly improves the hygienic quality with less loss of nutrients than soaking hay.

Year-round ventilation and a little draft are air-quality boosters. "Open doors, windows and vents to keep air moving year-round," Burnley advises. "Horses with a good rug don't mind cold temperatures in the winter."

Stable Environment

Maximum time outdoors is the agreed ideal for healthy horses, but most dressage horses' realities include lots of hours indoors.

"Boredom is a stabled horse's worst enemy," says Burnley. While people might prefer a nice quiet atmosphere, a busy barn is often best for horses.

"Many of our horses enjoy their turnout, but when you look out 30 minutes later, they are at the gate ready to come back into the barn," the veterinarian explains. "It is usually because they enjoy their stall due to a busy, interactive stable environment." Clean stalls, ventilated interiors, ample, clean, fresh water and feed, effective fly-control systems and proximity to buddies are all part of that. "All horses need stimulation in multiple forms and have special social needs. A busy barn, once horses adjust to it, makes for happy horses."

Stall toys are good stimulation, Burnley adds. Amazing Graze Treat Toys by Horsemen's Pride are a favorite at Wrenwood Dressage. The device dispenses a small amount of treats, forage or, in the Burnleys' case, pellets, when moved in a certain way. "It really helps when they can't have turnout at shows to keep them entertained for hours."

Good lighting facilitates constructive regular checks of the horses and their hay and water supply, but horses don't benefit from night lights. "Many horses need a dark stall to sleep well, so don't forget to turn off those good lights at night."

What the Silvermans' horses stand on is a priority for the couple, who happened upon ComfortStall's sealed, orthopedic flooring system when it came with a San Diego stable they purchased several years ago. They made it a priority in their current barn in Rancho Santa Fe, where Mark's Sporthorse Veterinary Services and his Southern California Equine

Podiatry Center are based.

Minor weight shifts required to stand on the cushioned surface stimulate circulation to the point of greatly reducing lower-leg inflammation, Tiffany explains. The constant motion is great for joint health and eliminates the need for overnight bandaging of her horse's legs unless there's a medical reason to do so. Mark values the cushioning aspect for the many laminitic or otherwise footsore cases in the podiatry branch of his practice.

"Everybody lays down on it," adds Tiffany. "From a 7-year-old Second Level horse to a 21-year-old Grand Prix horse, their tails are full of shavings in the morning." Hock sores are not an issue with this flooring and it's a money-saver because bedding is not needed for cushioning: only a small amount of bedding is required to absorb urine.

All horses need stimulation in multiple forms and have special social needs. A busy barn, once horses adjust to it, makes for a happy horse.

Florida-based Amy Swerdlin's homebred Oldenburg, Quileute CCW, had a terrific 2017. The Quarterback gelding helped Swerdlin become the number one ranked amateur for Prix St. Georges and Fourth Level, and has continued to progress.

Quileute's future, however, didn't look so bright as a 5-year-old. That's when he began developing what became a chronic cough, occasionally so severe he was unrideable.

Swerdlin's husband, Scott, is a veterinarian and president of Palm Beach Equine Clinic in Wellington, so she had access to a wide range of expertise and methods to address it.

Ventipulmin syrup was an option that made the already hot horse extra wired, plus it's not allowed for competition. Tests determined that Quileute was al-

lergic "to a ton of stuff," Swerdlin says. Unfortunately, that includes the Bahia grass common to pastures and landscapes throughout the Wellington area where the Swerdlins and their horses live year-round. The facility's 33 paddocks, for example, are all planted with Bahia.

The Swerdlins replanted one paddock in St. Augustine grass, which helped quell Quileute's cough a little. Soaking his hay to reduce allergens seemed to help some, too, but it was a switch to cardboard bedding that brought about a "180-degree improvement," Swerdlin reports. "You would think shavings are dusty, but it's straw that's the worst for having a lot of allergens. High-quality shavings can be low dust, but Quileute is super-sensitive."

After trying all types of bedding, including ground-up diapers and pellets, she was delighted to find that a relatively new product, Airlite Animal Bedding, worked wonders. "The very next day his coughing was

already down," she says. "It's made such an amazing difference." Airlite looks like normal shavings, "but it's fluffier and way more absorbent with zero dust." It also decomposes to black dirt in 60 days, Swerdlin reports of an environmentally friendly side benefit. The Swerdlins changed all the stalls in Quileute's barn to Airlite to reduce overall dust. An open, airy shedrow barn design, with partitions composed mostly of bars, enables great ventilation.

Having 24/7 access to veterinary expertise is handy for sure, but these suggestions allow all to implement simple best practices for happy, healthy horses day in and day out. As Burnley says, it all starts with the simplest and most affordable endeavor: getting to know horses well enough to create an individualized care routine. 🐾