

DRESSAGE TODAY

VOL. 24

EXTRA

*David Marcus:
Structure Your
Warm-Up*

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FROM THE DRESSAGE TODAY ARCHIVES

INTRO

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STRUCTURE THE WARM-UP

A Canadian Olympian explains the three must-haves for a purposeful start to your horse's work session.

By David Marcus with Hilary Moore Hebert
Photos by Susan J. Stickle

I often teach clinics where I am asked, "Do you mind if I come into the arena a few minutes prior to my lesson to warm up?" "Sure," I say, only to see the rider trotting and cantering around on a long rein with absolutely no control. Her (or his) thought process is generally that she wants to allow her horse time to warm up his joints and muscles. However, her horse is thinking, *Here I am, running around with my head wherever I want and at whatever speed I want*, and then he feels confused when she says, "Now, I want to put you together like a show horse," and he doesn't like the new set of rules. It is like having a kid without a curfew suddenly getting one: He is bound to argue.

For this reason, I prefer a very structured, systematic approach to my riding that begins with the warm-up. From green to Grand Prix, it is about knowing I can do three things: 1. Check and train my horse's reactions to my seat, leg and rein. 2. Check and train my ability to regulate the length of my horse's stride, and 3. check and train my ability to control his overall shape.

As you can see, I don't just use the warm-up to give my horse time for his muscles and joints to literally warm up.





Studies show that walking for 20 minutes reduces the chance of tendon and ligament injury. Therefore, I make this an important part of my warm-up. Here, I ride the walk with Don Kontes, owned by Deborah Kinzinger Miculinic.

Every moment I am sitting on my horse's back I am teaching him something, and the warm-up is no different. The work has to be directly relatable to his training. I want to have a set of rules that apply to where I want the rest of my ride to go. These three variables may be the whole focus when working a green horse. While on a Grand Prix horse, like my 2012 Olympic partner Chrevi's Capital, it might take only the first five or 10 minutes of our ride.

Here is how I ride a warm-up with purpose to improve my horse's reaction time, stride length and overall shape.

Reaction Time

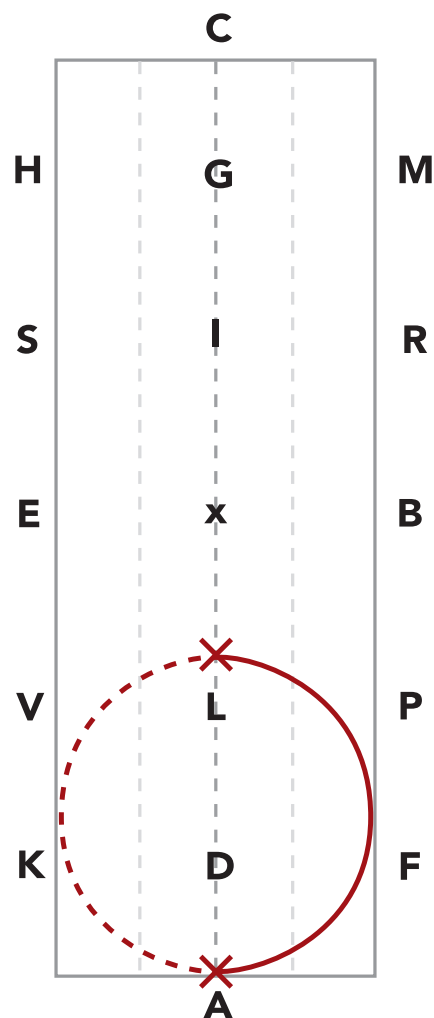
Once I have walked on a long rein for 20 minutes, I start in trot. Studies have

shown that walking for 20 minutes reduces the chance of tendon and ligament injury. For this reason, I make this an important part of my warm-up. I then start in a relaxed working trot rising. I ride long and low in both directions, making sure my horse is flexible and reaching forward toward the bit.

I start to work my horse with transitions within the gait on large 20-meter circles and long, straight lines. The goal at this point is to find the rhythmic, harmonious version of my horse.

As we are all aware, the first step of the Training Scale is rhythm. However, we cannot control the rhythm until we can control our horse's reactions. Here is an exercise that I would do to make certain he is moving forward on his own

Exercise 1



———— = more forward trot

- - - - - = working trot

with an immediate answer to the tiniest of aids.

Exercise 1 – 20-meter Circle in Rising Trot, Forward and Back

This is an exercise I would do on any horse, from green to Grand Prix. By riding alternating half circles of forward

and working trot, I check my horse's reaction time to the transition aids. I prefer this exercise to riding quick transitions of a few steps because I think those can often create tension, and that is never my intention.

At this point, it is not necessary to ride a true lengthening/extended trot in this exercise. The goal is to create the reaction to my aids by the way I engage my horse in a more forward trot from the leg. I make sure that I then reward him and repeat the exercise.

Here is how to ride a 20-meter circle in rising trot at either end of the arena, for example, at A:

1. Ride the first half of the circle with a more forward trot, from A to centerline.
2. Ride the second half of the circle, from the centerline to A, in a more working trot.

My focus is on the quickness of my horse's reaction to my aids—both “go” and “whoa”—at A and centerline. At A, I ask for the more forward trot. My expectation would be to get a reaction equal to my aid. If I feel this has happened, I immediately reward his response with either a soft pat of my inside hand or a gentle “good” with my voice.

Once I approach the centerline, I ask my horse to return to a normal working trot by closing my outside rein, squeezing softly with my knees and relaxing in my body. I maintain the working trot for another half of the circle until I approach A again.

If my horse did not immediately react to the smallest of aids the first time we were at A, I repeat the exercise. This time when I get to A, I ask for a quicker reaction by increasing the volume of my leg aids. It is important to note that after I've done this, I always repeat the transition the next time around with the smallest of aids to check his response as a result of the training from this increased aid.



Riding forward and back on a 20-meter circle can be done in trot as well as in canter. In canter, I use my outside leg to go more forward (A) and I use both of my upper legs when asking the horse to come back (B).

I repeat this exercise until I have created a horse who is reacting immediately to my aids. Then I can change direction and repeat the circle exercise on the other rein.

Tips for the exercise: I always make sure to pay attention to my geometry so I am aware of where my horse's body is under me and how he is reacting to my aids as I apply them to transition, turn or rebalance. When I am committed to a certain circle and my horse is suddenly off that line, it heightens my awareness of where he is (or is not) under my body.

I also pay attention to maintaining the same energy throughout so my horse has the same desire to go forward in the working-trot portion of the exercise. I want my horse to stay in front of my leg throughout. That means my horse has the desire to go forward on his own even on the slower side.

I think it is also important to note that this exercise can be done in both trot and canter. My expectations will remain the same in both gaits, however the use of my leg will be different. I use my lower leg to go forward, specifically my inside leg in trot and my outside leg in canter. I use both of my upper legs to slow my horse in trot and canter.

Exercise 2—Leg Yield From the Diagonal

For an upper-level horse, I might also add the test of leg-yielding in the warm-up. Riding the leg yield from the diagonal is a great exercise for any horse confirmed in the movement. I would not use this exercise to teach leg yield. It's a test to check balance, straightness and suppleness.

1. Go across the diagonal in rising trot, M–X–K.
2. At X, turn that diagonal into a leg yield right from X–K.
3. Make sure your horse is parallel to the long side in the leg yield.

4. At K, straighten your horse for a stride before bending through the corner and then proceed straight on the short side.

I like to do this exercise because I find that it is a more gymnastic exercise to go from the right rein to the leg yield right in the left flexion than from the right rein to the leg yield left in right flexion. At X I would change my posting diagonal so that my new inside leg is naturally coming on the horse as I am asking him to step sideways into the new direction. The horse doesn't anticipate the pattern of this exercise because it is not typically practiced. As a result, it is a truer representation of the honesty of his reactions than doing the leg yield in a place in the arena that your horse may anticipate.

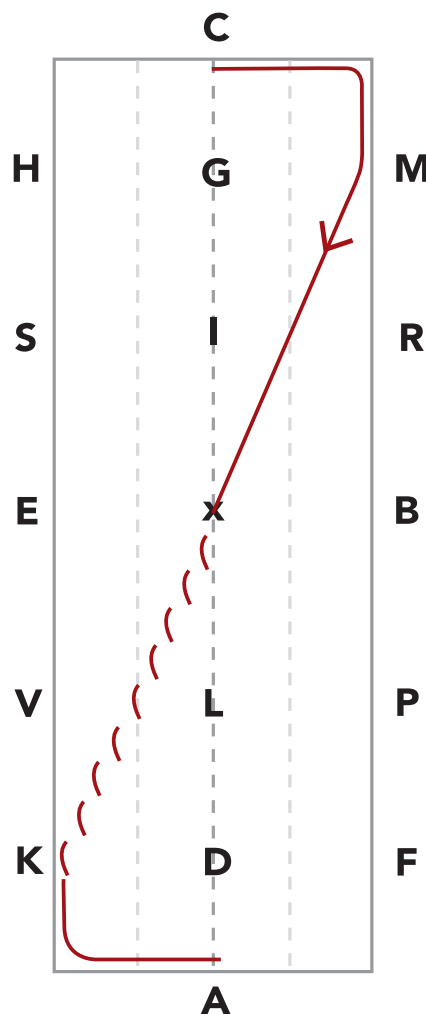
How many times I repeat this exercise is related to how easy it is for that horse. If I can do this exercise very smoothly the first time, where the only thing that changes is the orientation of his body, I will move on to the other rein and repeat the exercise. If not, I will repeat the same exercise until I feel secure in the ease of the movement.

Troubleshooting: The common things that go wrong with this exercise are generally related to the hotness or laziness of my horse.

On a hotter horse, I like the exercise because as I turn the diagonal into a leg yield right, the horse will have an easier time going parallel as he is quick off the leg aid. However, it is common that he will run through my new outside rein. In this instance, I check that he is responsive to my slowing aids and outside rein throughout the exercise. If necessary, I will even add a transition to walk and back to trot while maintaining the leg yield.

A lazy horse will not commonly run through my outside rein, but will possibly lose energy in his hind end as we go into the leg yield, making it harder to

Exercise 2

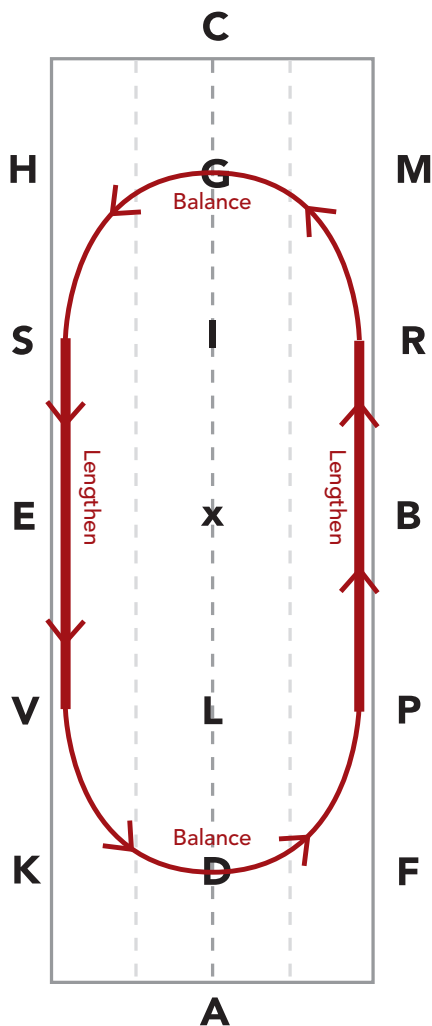


— = straight ahead, rising trot

(= leg yield, rising trot

maintain the horse's body in a position parallel to the long side. In that case, I spend more time on the second half of the diagonal, making sure to create the parallel-to-the-long-side aspect by getting a reaction to my leg-yielding aids while maintaining my focus on his forward desire.

Exercise 3



Stride Length

Now that I have a horse who is reacting immediately to the smallest of aids, it's time for me to move on to the next exercise that will help me manage the length of my horse's stride. An important thing to think about during this

phase of the warm-up is to avoid losing the quality I have created in getting immediate reactions to minimal aids.

Now that I have control of my horse's reaction to the aids and he has a desire to move forward, I can work on developing his stride length. Here is how.

Exercise 3—Transitions Into and Out of Lengthened/Medium Trot

This exercise is going to be a variation on Exercise 1 with the focus being on the quality of the gait as opposed to the reaction time to my aids. The goal is to maintain balance and rhythm as I transition from a working trot to a lengthened or medium trot in order to create adjustability in my horse's stride length.

I begin on a 20-meter half circle in working trot as I did in Exercise 1. But this time I go between working trot and lengthened trot, utilizing the long side to develop scope and quality in medium trot. In Exercise 1, I was more concerned with reaction time. But with this exercise, opening it up to an oval, I allow my horse to successfully achieve correct rhythm and balance. I may go straight for half the long side or my horse may require use of the full arena. For instance,

1. Begin in rising trot, on the left rein.
2. Ride a 20-meter half-circle from R to S in a balanced trot.
3. Ride from S to V in a lengthened or medium trot.
4. Repeat the balanced trot on a 20-meter half-circle from V to P
5. Ride from P to R in a lengthened or medium trot.

With time, I will be able to take a horse that can stay balanced on the larger ovals back onto the 20-meter circle without losing quality. Only then is the 20-meter circle appropriate for the exercise.

Once I take a walk break, I might repeat the exercise in canter. My approach in the canter for the lower-level horse

is the same as it is in trot. I find what approach makes the horse comfortable. For upper-level horses in the canter, I also ride in a working gait with the same idea of comfort but with more connection to the bridle and focus on the horse's uphill balance.

Body Shape

At this point, I allow myself to be mindful of my horse's body shape and the way he is carrying his neck. Through quickening his reaction time and adjusting his stride length, I can now become more aware of how his frame can be affected.

Oftentimes, we fear the topic of controlling the neck because it is such a taboo topic. However, I need to be able to control my horse's outline and neck shape. I need to be able to adjust the height of his neck from where I would want the poll in the show ring (see Photo A, p. 8) to where I would want it in the stretching trot (see Photo B, p. 8). What is important to remember is that correct neck control is not about pulling a horse's head down into a frame. Instead, the ability to correctly control the height of the neck is directly related to the horse's correct response to the aids, impulsion and adjustability of the stride. For that reason, I have saved it as my last topic.

No one exercise fits every horse to develop adjustability in neck height. Every horse's conformation is different and this plays such a big part in my ability to give you concrete guidelines. For this reason, the focus must be different depending on the horse and instead of one clear exercise, I focus on remembering these five tips:

1. The horse should always be reaching to the bridle from active hind legs over a supple back, no matter his neck height.
2. The highest a horse's poll should go is the frame you would see in a show frame for the level he is working.



I need to be able to adjust the height of Don Altena's neck from where I would want his poll in the show ring (A) to where I would want it in the stretching trot (B). The ability to correctly control the height of the neck is directly related to the horse's correct response to the aids, impulsion and adjustability of the stride.

3. The poll can go as low as you'd like as long as your horse continues to reach forward toward the bit and it is not maintained for long periods of time.
4. The ability to control the neck is a direct reflection of how a horse is using his hind legs and back. If you do not have the ability to raise or lower his neck, first check that he is active enough behind—the slow hind leg can create a hollow back and, thus, no ability to control the neck.
5. In general, if a horse wants to maintain a very high head and neck carriage, work to lower the neck, and if a horse wants to maintain a very low head and neck carriage, work to raise the neck.

After riding through all of these exercises and focusing on these variables, I should now have a horse who is truly reactive to my aids, truly in front of my leg, giving me the ability to harmoniously control the length of his stride and the shape of his neck. Only now am I ready to start the training portion of my ride. Sometimes I spend the whole ride or lesson on something considered a warm-up variable, but the goal should and must always be to get the quality first. 🐾

David Marcus is among North America's top dressage competitors. He and Chrevi's Capital represented Canada at the 2012 Olympic Games and 2014 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. A dual citizen of the United States and Canada, Marcus is a well-respected trainer who has helped students of all levels meet their goals. He and his husband, Nicholas Fyffe, operate Marcus Fyffe Dressage, a year-round training operation at the heart of the equestrian scene in Wellington, Florida.



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A woman wearing a black riding helmet, a light grey t-shirt, and light-colored breeches is riding a brown horse with a white blaze on its face. The horse is wearing white wraps on its lower legs. They are in a sunlit field with a blurred background of trees and a fence. A stylized sun graphic is in the upper left.

FROM THE DRESSAGE TODAY ARCHIVES

SUMMER HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

Veterinarians offer tips on how to keep your horse safe and comfortable in the scorching summer months.

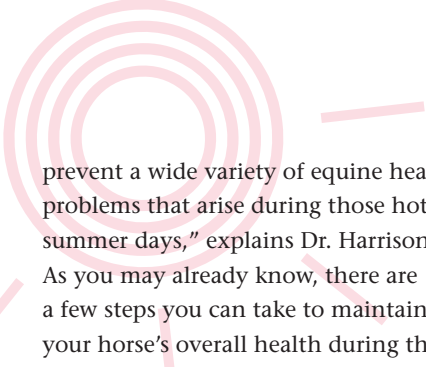
By Annie Morris

Summer arrives with longer days, brilliant sunshine and weekends of memorable horse shows. But warmer weather doesn't always mean smooth sailing in the realm of riding and horse care. Insects, high temperatures and humidity during the summer months require special precautions, which, depending on your horse, may require minor to significant changes in his management. To learn more about dealing with the challenges of summer, *Dressage Today* spoke with Dr. Emily Harrison, of southern New York, Dr. John Lockamy of Wellington, Florida, and Dr. Elaine Carpenter, based in Cave Creek, Arizona.

Summer Basics

Ensuring that your horse has a happy and healthy summer begins with preparation. "Planning ahead and being generally proactive in your stable management can

Entering the season healthy can help keep horses in top condition under the stress of heat and humidity. Make sure that your horse is up to date on vaccinations and deworming.



prevent a wide variety of equine health problems that arise during those hot summer days,” explains Dr. Harrison. As you may already know, there are a few steps you can take to maintain your horse’s overall health during the summer months.

For starters, make sure that your horse is up to date on his regular vaccinations and deworming schedule. Entering the season healthy can help keep horses in top condition under the stress of heat and humidity. Making sure that your horse has plenty of water is obvious, but should not be taken lightly. In the summer months it is especially important to take note of how much water your horse regularly consumes. This can also help you to notice if he is drinking less water than usual.

Check to make sure that your barn has adequate airflow, as a well-ventilated barn is important not only for keeping horses cool, but also for keeping bugs at bay. Placing a horse-safe box fan outside your horse’s stall can be helpful to create additional circulation.

If you plan to haul your horse in a trailer during particularly hot times in the season, try to arrange your travel plans so that you are transporting him during the coolest parts of the day, such as early in the morning or later in the evening. To further ensure that your horse stays as comfortable as possible, you can body-clip him and protect him from the sun with a fly mask and fly sheet.

If your horse has pink skin on his face, you can also apply sunscreen to prevent sunburn. Ideally, if your horse is turned out, you should also try to provide adequate shade for him to get away from the sun, either in the form of trees or a run-in shed. Sometimes, however, horses with even the best care have difficulty tolerating the trials of summer heat and can suffer dermatologic conditions such as sweet itch or summer



Bring a bucket with a little bit of rubbing alcohol mixed with water and a sponge to the arena so in the middle of a ride you can wet the insides of the horse’s legs, where the blood vessels are close to the surface, the flank and the neck to help him cool off. The rubbing alcohol will help the water evaporate more quickly.

sores, or even lose their ability to sweat or tolerate extreme heat.

Common Conditions

During the summer, horses may be at risk for **heat stress**, a condition Dr. Carpenter is very aware of in Arizona. “If your horse is not feeling well during hot weather, heat stress may be a factor,” she explains. Signs of heat stress can include lethargy, increased temperature, increased respiration, increased heart rate, abnormal sweating and, in extreme cases, muscle tremors and the horse going down on the ground.

A vet might find the horse anemic, with a lowered white blood-cell count.

Heat stroke is an acute attack of heat

stress, when the horse suddenly exhibits these signs, especially during intense exercise. Once a horse is in a situation where he is experiencing heat stress, his muscles can begin to break down. The muscles release an enzyme that can damage the kidneys if not properly managed. If the horse’s urine is red or brown a couple hours after heat stress symptoms are evident, test the kidneys for damage.

There are preventive steps you can take to protect your horse from heat stress. “Try to keep him in a cool environment,” Dr. Carpenter suggests. “In Arizona we use misting fans in the barn and the arena. We also suggest that riders exercise their horses in the early

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Beer is an old horseman's remedy, but it can help improve sweating function because it is theorized that the yeast cultures prompt the horse to sweat.

morning because it is the coolest part of the day." Watch the horse carefully for signs of **anhidrosis**, the inability to sweat, because if the horse cannot thermoregulate, he is more susceptible to heat stress. Take the horse's temperature if he is not acting himself.

"You can also monitor the temperature of horses that may be at risk during and after your ride," Dr. Carpenter says. The normal temperature range is between 99–102.5 degrees Fahrenheit. You also will want to consider your horse's physical condition and adjust your ride to give him plenty of breaks and assess the appropriate intensity of his workload. Overwork can lead to heat stress.

If you worry that your horse is overheating, spray him with water or sponge him with an alcohol bath to bring his temperature down. Involve your vet, who can administer IV fluids, which not

only cool the horse but also flush the muscle enzymes that may collect in the kidneys. The vet may also use an ice-water enema or an alcohol bath to cool the horse quickly.

Some horses that live in areas of high heat and humidity can develop anhidrosis, according to Dr. Lockamy. This is a very serious condition, as it can lead to heat stress. "Anhidrosis happens when the sweat glands become refractory, or insensitive, to the presence of epinephrine," Dr. Lockamy explains.

"When the horse gets hot, his body releases epinephrine, which triggers the sweat glands to release sweat, and as it evaporates, it cools the horse down."

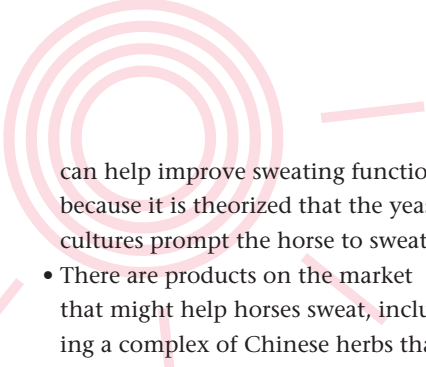
In locations where the heat-humidity index remains constant during the day and overnight, the horse never gets a chance to cool off and there's a continuous epinephrine release over a long

period of time. "So what happens," says Dr. Lockamy, "is the sweat glands get insensitive to the presence of the epinephrine so they function less or stop functioning completely."

There are a few steps a horse owner can take to reduce the risk of the horse developing anhidrosis. "Focus on the ventilation in the barn," Dr. Lockamy suggests. "Many horses are outside and turned out for a few hours, but the rest of the time they are in the stall box, so you want to make sure they have great ventilation in the barn, including fans that may need to be running constantly over the hot months." Keeping the horse as cool as possible reduces the risk of refractory sweat glands.

If you notice that your horse is sweating less than normal, consult your veterinarian. There are steps your vet may recommend that can help the horse regain sweating function:

- Always check the thyroid function on a horse that you suspect might be having trouble thermoregulating. There is a blood test that your veterinarian can administer called the blood serum thyroid assay test. The thyroid gland is the most sensitive gland in the body and if its function is low, the horse may have trouble sweating.
- Don't be excessive with electrolyte use. A University of Florida study demonstrated that increased electrolytes do not improve sweat function, so feed the recommended amount of electrolyte supplement.
- Bring a bucket with a little bit of rubbing alcohol mixed with water and a sponge to the arena so that in the middle of a ride you can wet the insides of the horse's legs, where the blood vessels are close to the surface, the flank and the neck to help the horse cool off. The rubbing alcohol will help the water evaporate more quickly.
- Give the horse a can of beer in the morning and at night in his feed. Beer is an old horseman's remedy, but it



can help improve sweating function because it is theorized that the yeast cultures prompt the horse to sweat.

- There are products on the market that might help horses sweat, including a complex of Chinese herbs that sometimes help. Even though the use of Chinese herbs is less conventional, some horse owners might prefer this approach over the use of drugs and other medications. Dr. Lockamy has had particular success with a product called New Xiang Ru San, a Chinese herbal supplement.
- For horses that still don't sweat, Dr. Lockamy recommends a low dose of clenbuterol in the morning. Clenbuterol is a bronchodilator, but the side effect of the drug is sweating. "It's not an ideal drug because it is tough on the cardiac system, but we use a very low dosage to help get through the summer for problematic horses," he says.

One of the more prevalent health problems that Dr. Harrison sees during warmer weather is insect-bite hypersensitivity, commonly known as **sweet itch** or summer eczema. Dr. Harrison explains that a hypersensitivity reaction is most often found on the belly, face, base of the tail and along the base of the mane.

It appears as a crusty skin lesion that may be weeping serum and is red from repeated irritation. In more severe cases, she explains, there may be large patches of hairless skin. You may see your horse repeatedly try to scratch himself on objects in the barn or field.

Sweet itch is caused by the horse's allergic reaction to the saliva of culicoides, or biting midges, which causes intense itching that can severely damage the skin.

This problem is generally seen when temperatures are compatible with the midge fly's larvae hatching. "Prevention and proactive management are



To protect your horse from biting midges, use a full face fly mask and well-fitted fly sheet.

Amy K. Drago

key aspects to limiting the effects of the allergic response," Dr. Harrison advises.

To protect the horse from biting midges, she suggests you apply these management tactics:

- Use a full-face fly mask and well-fitted fly sheet that wraps under the horse's belly and protects the neck. These sheets are lightweight so they do not overheat the horse.
- Fly sprays can help keep midges off the horses but be aware that the repellent effect is often short-lived.
- Avoid turnout at dawn and dusk because biting midges are most active at these times. You can also switch to night turnout.
- When possible, turn horses out together because they will often stand nose to tail in an effort to swish insects away from each other.
- Use ceiling fans and stall-side fans to promote air circulation.
- Pick pastures and maintain clean stalls. Insects breed in manure.
- Keep horses out of paddocks with areas of stagnant water—a feeding ground for flies and other insects.

Once you have identified a horse with sweet itch based on the clinical signs, involve your veterinarian. Treatment may include antihistamines or steroids. Allergy shots can help desensitize some horses but the effects aren't usually seen until the following summer season.

Protecting your horse from flying insects by taking the above precautions

can also reduce the occurrence of **summer sores**, according to Dr. Lockamy. They are most common in tropical or temperate climates and appear as open, inflamed, itchy sores on the lower legs, lips, ears and other moist areas of the body. They are caused by the larvae of the Habronema or Draschia worms, which live in the horse's stomach and reproduce by sending their eggs out into the environment through the horse's manure.

The larvae are incubated and carried by stable flies in the manure, after which time they usually complete their life cycle when they re-enter the horse. However, sometimes a fly will deposit the larvae onto a scratch or break in the horse's skin, which causes the summer sore.

If you suspect your horse has a summer sore, call your veterinarian. He or she may recommend a larvicidal treatment such as ivermectin, an antimicrobial to prevent secondary infection and an anti-inflammatory such as a corticosteroid to reduce inflammation and itching.

An untreated summer sore not only can become incredibly itchy and uncomfortable for the horse but can also develop a large amount of proud flesh, which can require minor surgery to remove.

With these strategies at hand to help combat the stresses of summer, your training sessions might be more productive than you had imagined. 🐾



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