

## MANAGING RESTRICTED TURNOUT

The cold and wet weather creates difficulties when managing horses during the winter and early spring months. With the recent wet and stormy weather, grazing and turnout areas may have become saturated and horses are spending an increasing portion of their day indoors. Here are some topics for owners to consider when horses have to deal with a forced amount of time indoors due to the poor weather.

### Rugging

Winter can be difficult for horse owners when it comes to rugs. While it is important for horses to be kept warm during winter, owners should ensure that if their horses are wearing rugs, they should be taken off at least once a day to give the horse a thorough check over. If two rugs are worn, consider if they are needed all day, or whether the extra layer would be of more benefit if just put on at night. Check the horse's temperature and feel underneath the rug to ensure he does not get too warm. Over rugging a horse can cause him to overheat, which can lead to dehydration and a host of health problems. Remember a horse with his natural winter coat may not need to be rugged as long as he has shelter from the elements, is receiving proper nutrition and is in good health.



### Exercise

Daily exercise is essential for the overall health of the horse year-round. Feral horses will regularly travel more than 20 miles a day, making it an important activity for circulation, strength of bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments and health of the hooves. Regular exercise helps keep tendons and muscles loose which helps prevent injury and lameness. With limitations on exercise from flooded or frozen roads, arenas, fields and turnout facilities, as well as reduced daylight hours, exercise regimes may have become disrupted, but there are a number of ways owners can get their horses legs stretched.

- Horse walkers – An increasing number of yards now use horse walkers to assist with exercising horses. A horse walker is excellent for warming up horses prior to work, cooling down after work and keeping them moving if turnout is problematic.
- Walking in hand – If a horse walker is not available, and the weather has restricted turnout availability, it is important to get your horse out of the stable for a period of time each day. This may come in the form of walking in hand, around the yard or other safe space.
- Lungeing – Lungeing is an excellent exercise which can be carried out in a smaller space than that needed for riding and can allow the horse to walk, trot and canter for up to 20 mins per day depending on fitness levels.

- Turnout – If turnout is available either in fields, arena or specific turnout area, horses should be turned out for a period of time every day. If this is not possible, it is worth considering stabling in large barns where horses have space to move around.
- Off Road Riding Access – Off road riding trails and organised pleasure rides are a pleasant way to allow horses to be exercised away from busy and weather affected roads.

## **Feeding**

When a horse's normal exercise regime has been decreased due to limited riding or turnout facilities, it is extremely important to adjust their feed. As they will not be expending as much energy, they do not need as many calories. Consider increasing the forage percentage and decreasing the concentrate portion of the horses' feed. The process of digesting fibre also helps to keep a horse warmer due to the internal heat produced during fibre processing.

## **Stable Management**

Regular grooming and handling provides the opportunity to evaluate the horse and alerts the owner to problems such as illness, injury, weight loss, lost shoes and cracked hooves. Grooming also provides some stimulation for the horse as well as boosting circulation. The stable environment itself should also be considered. The stable should be well ventilated to ensure good airflow inside, as a closed-up barn leads to poor air quality that can affect a horse's respiratory health.

Some horses will suffer from swollen legs if they spend a large part of their day in the stable and correctly fitted stable bandages can alleviate swelling.

If you have any concerns about the health of your horse, veterinary or professional advice should always be sought.