

One of my favorite parts about being an equine veterinarian (horse doctor) is the opportunity to share knowledge and information with my patient's owners! Every visit with your vet is an opportunity for you as a horse owner to become a more informed owner which makes you more prepared for those sure-to-come bumps in the road that accompany horse ownership. Some important things for veterinarians (and horse owners) to remember is that not every horse owner has the same knowledge base. Not every horse owner grew up with horses in their backyard. Not every horse owner is well versed in the finer points of horse owner jargon. And every horse owner learns differently. In order for veterinarian-patient-and client to work in tandem as a well oiled machine, we all have to be on the same page (well, mostly vet and owner... the horse doesn't particularly care what we are talking about, just that he's well cared for!).

With that in mind I thought I'd share with you what I like to call the Big 5 of Horse Husbandry. Husbandry meaning management, care, and cultivation of animals. Horse care can be overwhelming! There is so much that goes into caring for a horse, so it can be hard to know where to start. Maybe it's the fact that I have spent 21 of my almost 30 years of life as a student... but I like lists and I like grouping things together to make them simpler to understand and remember! Ergo, the Big 5! 5 categories of what you need to address so YOU as an owner can give your horse the best opportunity to be/stay/become a healthy, happy horse!

- Nutrition
- Exercise/routine
- Teeth
- Grooming and deworming
- Vaccinations

I like to share information... and since I'd like people to actually read this info I'm going to break this up into a few different installments. So for now I've included parts 1 and 2.

1. Nutrition

So if you own a horse (like I do) you're probably guilty of operating with the mantra of "food is love" (I most certainly can be!). Which isn't always also in the best interest of our horses. Really what we ought to be doing is *feeding to meet their need*. The truth of the matter is that the average pasture pet/light riding horse gets all of the nutrients they need from good quality pasture and/or hay. The harder your horse works the more they require additional energy supply provided by grain. If you have any question about what you should be feeding, how much you should be feeding, etc PLEASE contact us! We would be delighted to help you come up with a nutrition plan that meets the needs of you horse! But the basic nutritional info that every owner NEEDS to be aware of are as follows:

- **WATER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT NUTRIENT!!! CLEAN, PLENTIFUL WATER!!!!**
This is quite possibly the simplest, yet most overlooked part of horse nutrition.

- **HAY:** A mature horse needs to eat 2-2.5% of its body weight daily... at least HALF of this should be roughage. That's 1-1.5% of their body weight. Now, don't freak about about this equine math problem... it basically boils down to 1000 lb horse=10lbs of roughage each day. But what type of hay do I feed? Alfalfa? Bermuda grass? Timothy? For more information on choosing hay click [here](#).
- Feed on a regular schedule... come up with a plan and stick to it... which brings me to #2 of the Big 5.

2. Exercise/routine

This may seem a strange pairing, but we all have that horse whose main source of exercise each day is walking up to the feed bucket twice a day. Horses are routine oriented creatures, and they love to have a job. Yes, even that old pasture pet. So give them a job! Even if it is just coming up to get groomed, and loved on, and fed. Establish a routine and stick to it! If your horse is an athlete the same certainly applies. Even the oldest, sweetest of horses can “go native” if you deviate from the routine. Catch them, run your hands over them. Trust me, it'll make the vet's and your own life easier if in the event you have to doctor a wound or when the time comes for vaccines and deworming (more on those things in a future blog!). And your horse doesn't have to be paid up in the All American or preparing for a 100 mile endurance ride to have an exercise routine. Even light exercise such as lunging for 15 minutes a few times a week, weekend trail riding, or carrying a grandkid around the pasture keeps horses in shape (especially when paired with a good nutrition plan, see what I did there?) and helps keep excess weight off which can delay the onset of certain age related endocrine diseases.

And keep this in mind: change in feed and change in routine are the 2 biggest predisposing factors to causing **colic!** So if that's not a good reason to pay attention to these two things then I don't know what is! For more about colic check out [this](#) and Dr Starr's “What is Colic?” found [here](#).