



HORSE SA

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Tips for the care of confined horses



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1. Introduction

Tips for the Care of Confined Horses have been compiled to assist stable managers & horse owners to enhance the living environment of confined horses.

Horses by nature are designed to be social animals, part of a herd, and to roam long distances. Confinement of any sort, particularly in isolation, is not natural to a flight animal and, without a well thought out feed, exercise and care program it can lead to boredom, stress and ultimately undesirable behaviours. Along with the provision of food, water and shelter, horse managers need to also consider ways to meet the social & mental needs of horses to prevent related behaviours occurring.

If a horse does start to exhibit on a frequent basis abnormal or unusual behaviour, then an individualised plan will be needed to reduce or eliminate the problem and to improve the welfare of the horse. This can only be achieved through observation, noting triggers and trialling solutions. Assistance from an equine animal behaviour professional or veterinarian may be required.

For the purposes of this guideline, confinement is described as housing where a horse has to have feed, water & shelter provided, typically described as a traditionally designed stable or yard. This description may also apply to some paddocks.

In general, areas of confinement are also too small to permit the horse natural exercise in all gaits. The manager will need to ensure the horse can exercise naturally in a larger area such as a paddock or have an exercise program planned which may include lunging, riding, driving or swimming.

The Australian Horse Welfare Protocol, State horse welfare Codes of Practice and some horse sport organisational regulations currently exist, which describe *minimum* standards of horse care. Horse managers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with codes relevant to their horse keeping enterprise.

2. Why horses may be confined

Confining a horse allows the trainer to fully control exercise and diet, reduce some types of disease & injury, promote a shorter growth of the coat or help a stud master prepare a horse for breeding.

Confinement may relate to cost, convenience, location e.g. urban environments or safety

Horses may also be confined for the convenience of having them close to training venues for time efficiency and training of multiple horses.

Horses may be confined to take pressure off paddocks at times, when say, pasture is stressed or waterlogged.

Trainers who prepare horses for racing or higher level equestrian sports are likely to use confinement as a tool to support a planned fitness program which is coupled with a higher energy diet.

Horses may spend full time in a stable or have a combination of stable & yard. Partial confinement programs are common, where the balance of time out of stable is spent in a paddock large enough to allow for natural exercise.

Temporary confinement is very common for veterinary treatment, foaling or as a tool to manage an overweight horse. Showgrounds and other horse event venues may require the use of temporary stabling for biosecurity and public safety.

With any confinement, the design of the stable in particular, needs to address the availability of size, natural lighting, ventilation (not draughts), bedding choice, heating & cooling.

A higher level of horse care skills & knowledge is required to care for confined horses in order that the carer can monitor food & water intake, behaviours, exercise regimes, manure & urine output, stable hygiene and general horse health.



3. Adaptable Feed Routines

A horse will forage (search and eat) for food, through the actions of grazing and browsing, for 14-16 hours a day. For the main part horses will graze with their head down, browsing generally happens with their head at a natural or higher position. This time is considerably shortened when modern feeding practices are adopted (i.e. set feeding times)

with prepared food which the horse does not have to work to find and eat.

For confined horses there are many ideas that managers can employ to slow down eating and lengthen the time spent foraging, or increase the interest level in their surroundings, while keeping meal times regular.



Slow feed haynet (small holes) next to a traditional haynet (large holes)

TIPS

- ✓ Check over your routine so see if there is an opportunity to increase the number of times per day a horse can receive a portion of the total ration.
- ✓ As a first option, use long stem hay at least 1% of the body weight in dry matter (minimum NRC 2007 requirements). As a second option, use a chaff that is course/rough cut/ long cut rather than short steam cut. The larger irregular pieces of hay or chaff will slow down eating & produce more saliva for better dental health & digestion.
- ✓ Investigate opportunities to vary what is received each meal within the total ration.
- ✓ Investigate options for slowly introducing / exchanging ingredients within a ration which will not cause digestive upset e.g. exchange types of oils, types of chaff.
- ✓ Use a slow-feed haynet or use a special feed bin designed to slow down the time taken to eat each meal.

- ✓ Provide a haynet of grass/ meadow hay in addition to the haynet containing the regular feed, place in different corners of the stable. The same can be done with buckets of chaff.
- ✓ Place the haynet in different positions each day, not only in different corners but at different heights. Feed on a rubber mat some days and in a bin on others.
- ✓ Place one of the haynets near the stable door so the horse can watch what is going on out in the yard at the same time.
- ✓ Place mineral, salt or flavoured licks or place in a container that can be repositioned easily for variety or provide free choice.
- ✓ Hays of the same type, but grown in different districts can add variety to a ration.
- ✓ Take the horse out for walks to graze on the lead on a fresh green pick of grass.

In addition to the regular feeding routine, provide options for flavour & texture:

- ✓ Mix in a handful of herbs (fresh or dried) suitable for horses, with the ration.
- ✓ A variety of flavours can be provided within water used to dampen down feeds e.g. molasses, herb teas or commercially available liquid additives.
- ✓ Freeze carrots, apples or other treats in an ice cream container. Place the ice cube into a feed bin. Cut treat into lengths, as round slices may cause choke with some horses.
- ✓ Drill a hole through carrots, turnips, fruit & other snacks, thread a cord resistant to chewing through the vegetable and attach to a firm object e.g. rail, so they swing and take a lot longer to eat.
- ✓ Hydroponically grown sprouted grains & legumes designed for horses are available as measured part of the main ration or as a treat. As with all new feeds, introduce slowly.

- ✓ Add small quantities of sprouted grains for flavour on top of the regular ration.
- ✓ Make treats. Google “home-made horse treats” or “Christmas Cake for Horses” or similar searches to bring up many recipes. Swap recipes with friends! Feed direct or use some of the ideas listed above to encourage foraging & other desirable behaviours.
- ✓ Use toys designed for horses that have a safe food related trigger.
- ✓ Use toys designed for horses that drop out a few pellets of feed or grains, as they are rolled around by the horse. There are models of these toys that are hung on walls, placed within feed bins or rolled on the floor.

Note: Haynet is used here as a generic term and may apply to hay bags, hay racks etc.

4. Filling in time between feeds

Activities that encourage the horse to occupy some time and allow the exhibition of natural behaviours are preferred. However, this will never replace daily exercise.

The less a horse has to occupy themselves (i.e. loss of continual grazing, lack of mutual grooming), the more likely a horse is to develop undesirable behaviours. Activities that encourage the horse to occupy some time which allows him to exhibit natural behaviours, however this will never replace daily exercise. Here are some tips & ideas to enhance opportunities for companionship and enhance the senses, mind and body.



Having a ball!

Rebecca Gimenez



Itching pole

Alayne Bickie

TIPS

- ✓ Make sure the horse can see what is going on around him (provide windows, viewing gaps in solid walls etc.)
- ✓ Play classical or calming music to aid in reducing anxiety in some horses may work.
- ✓ Turn out pairs of horses into a larger yard for a few hours each day
- ✓ Take time to groom, massage, stretch and interact with your horse each day.
- ✓ Install an acrylic mirror designed for horse stables these can also have a suitable toy designed for horses placed adjacent to them.
- ✓ Adapt housing design to allow for mutual grooming to take place with another horse.
- ✓ Isolated horses will benefit from a companion If a companion of the same species is not available a dog, cat, sheep, goat or donkey may provide some bonding & enrichment.

Toys and props which may promote natural behaviours:

- ✓ Traffic cones
- ✓ Rubber buckets and bins
- ✓ Balls (there are some on the market especially for horses)
- ✓ Commercial toys for horses are readily available and come in different scents
- ✓ Thick rope tied in all sorts of knots
- ✓ Toys can have a variety of smells added through wiping over with a therapeutic grade essential oil. (Note: Cheaper cosmetic and some aromatherapy oils have solvents and may harm the horse).

Ideas to provide opportunity for itching, pawing, rolling and similar behaviours:

- ✓ Set up a sprinkler outdoors in a yard that can be turned on from time to time or hand hold a hose as some horses do enjoy the gentle spray
- ✓ Build a large free-standing itching post
- ✓ Fix stiff natural fibre broom heads or laundry brushes at wither height to a post or rail for rubbing on
- ✓ Tip half a small trailer (half a tonne) of beach sand in the yard without raking out to promote pawing, rolling and laying down

- ✓ Find opportunities for horses to experience water or mud
- ✓ Suspend a collection of empty plastic 2L orange juice or cordial containers one or two with small stones in, which make a noise when nudged by the horse
- ✓ Lay poles out or a row of low plastic barrels
- ✓ Suspend a haynet with an old flat football in it so it can swing around when nudged.

Add variety to the physical living environment:

- ✓ Change the size or the shape of the yard occasionally
- ✓ Investigate establishment of laneway and “Central Point System” to increase social movement opportunities to jump or navigate around on the way to feed or water
- ✓ Rotate your favourite trail horse equipment in the yard, e.g. a small bridge
- ✓ Rotate horses around different stables within the same barn or complex
- ✓ Provide vegetation related enrichment e.g. trees, shrubs, as a source of foraging or shade

5. Glossary

Grazing: usually associated with animals feeding on grass or other low vegetation

Browsing: an activity in which an herbivore (which includes horses) feeds on leaves, soft shoots, or fruits of high growing, often woody, plants such as shrubs

Foraging: searching for and exploiting food resources. Browsing promotes a level of health & fitness in the horse through frequent walking (e.g. patch foraging behaviour)

Fodder: refers to food that is cut and carried to the horse e.g. hay

Enrichment: enhancing the environment of the animal so that the animal is physically, mentally, and emotionally occupied in a positive way.

Stable: a fully enclosed shelter for a horse, large enough for the horse to lie down easily & move around.

Yard: an outdoor fenced area for confining a horse, normally without grazing.

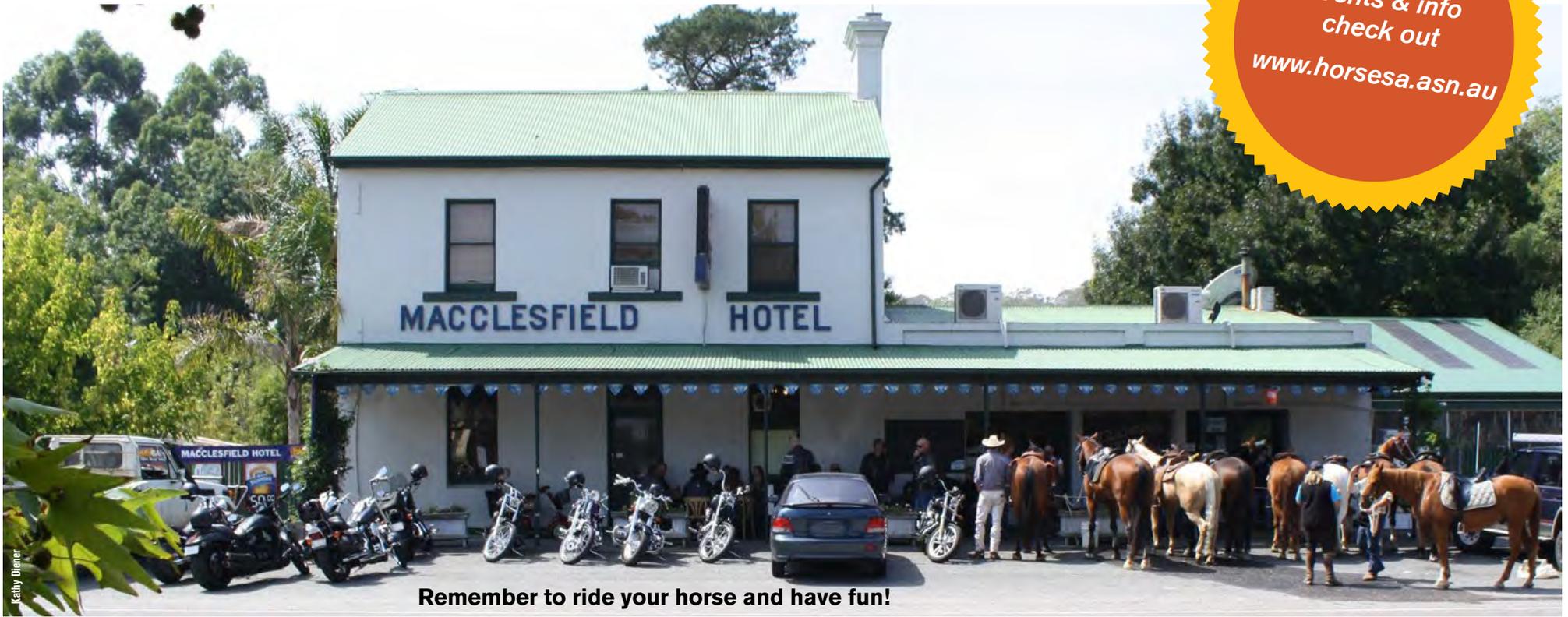
6. Links

Australian Horse Welfare Protocol
www.australiananimalwelfare.com.au/content/horse-welfare-protocol

The Protocol contains links to State Government Codes of Practice or Welfare

The National Research Council; Nutrient Requirements of Horses, 2007.

Online shop,
events & info
check out
www.horsesa.asn.au



Remember to ride your horse and have fun!