



**Horses and Ponies Protection Association**  
Registered Charity Number 1085211

Caring for the  
**Older Horse**

[www.happa.org.uk](http://www.happa.org.uk)

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## All you need to know... ...to look after your older equine

As equines get older, like us, they require a little more attention and care. They become more susceptible to disease and additional thought needs to be given to feeding, shelter and the management of their day to day health.

When your horse is ready for retirement, either due to health problems or old age, there are two questions you need to ask yourself:-

1. **Are you able to provide your friend with a happy and comfortable retirement?**
2. **Would you be kinder to put him to sleep?**



### KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN CARING FOR THE OLDER HORSE

#### SHELTER

This should be available all year round as the horse will need to be sheltered from flies during the summer months and the cold wet conditions of winter. The horse's coat should be allowed to grow so that it can develop its own thick and greasy, virtually waterproof coat.

#### FOOD

During the colder months, he will require more supplementary food. No healthy horse should be thin, although a gradual loss of weight is inevitable with advancing years

#### TEETH

When a horse gets older, they are less good at chewing and grinding food. Their teeth will require more attention and may need to be rasped to remove any sharp edges. You should also watch out for signs of 'quidding' - dropping half-chewed food out of the mouth. Also check for loose teeth. The vet may need to remove them if they are causing discomfort

#### FEET

These will require more attention as the horse grows older as feet can become more brittle and prone to cracking, flaking, drying out, etc. Less agile ponies can become susceptible to thrush as they move around less. A solution of hydrogen peroxide (30% of peroxide mixed with water) can be applied to the frog and cleft of the foot each week to prevent bacterial growth.

#### VACCINATIONS

Ensure that his tetanus vaccinations are kept up to date



## LAMINITIS

If your horse shows discomfort or reluctance to move, please be aware that it could be laminitis. Laminitis is one of the commonest causes of lameness and disability of ponies, and to a lesser extent horses, in this country. It is a painful and crippling disease of the hooves that can affect all four feet individually or in combination. Although all four feet may be affected, the disease is most obvious in the front feet as these take 60% of the animal's weight. Where all four feet are affected, the animal will stand with its legs underneath its body - the rocking horse stance. Where the front feet are most affected, the animal will stand with its forelegs stretched out in front, leaning back onto its hind legs.

Laminitis is a veterinary emergency so please call your vet immediately!

## SYMPTOMS

The hooves of an animal with laminitis are hot to the touch and the animal will constantly shift its weight from one foot to another, resting each leg in turn. The animal will be reluctant to move although those with a mild case may be willing to walk, putting the heel down first and lifting the foot quickly.

Because laminitis is a very painful condition, affected animals may sweat and breathe rapidly. In severe cases, ponies will lie down and refuse to rise.

If an animal has previously had laminitis, a prolonged dry period or a frosty spell that causes the ground to become hard, may cause the condition to re-occur. It is advisable to bed him on soft shavings or peat for part of the day, or night, if you suspect laminitis may be imminent.

## WOULD YOU BE KINDER TO PUT THE OLDER HORSE TO SLEEP?

Caring for an old or infirm horse takes a lot of commitment and very often a substantial amount of expense. Quality of life is the most important thing and it is the well being of the animal that must come before your feelings. The long term interest of the horse must outweigh everything else. Having an animal put to sleep in the home where he has been well loved is sometimes the final kindness you can offer him and you should not shirk from this duty

