

Horse Health and Happiness



“Despite thousands of years of domestication, a horse’s mind and body are still geared towards life in a wild herd”



The Charity's purpose is to provide and promote the welfare, care and protection of horses, ponies, donkeys and mules.

Redwings Welfare

Health and Happiness

As with people and all other animals, what we might call 'peace of mind' makes a significant contribution to the bodily health of an equine, as well as their overall quality of life. Anxiety, stress or depression can all contribute to serious conditions like weight loss, colic and laminitis, and may seriously impede recovery from any injury or disease. Psychological problems will also affect the performance of a working equine, whether they are a riding school pony, quiet hack or top racehorse. At Redwings, our horse management system is based on providing a lifestyle for equines that is as natural as possible. This has huge benefits for both the physical and psychological well-being of our residents.

Back to Basics

Despite thousands of years of domestication, a horse's mind and body are both still geared towards life in a wild herd. As a group, horses would wander over a wide area each day, spending 14-16 hours foraging for food and constantly assessing movement, noise and smells around them to check for danger. Horses are flight animals who survive by running away from predators, unlike humans who are fight animals and will fend off attackers.

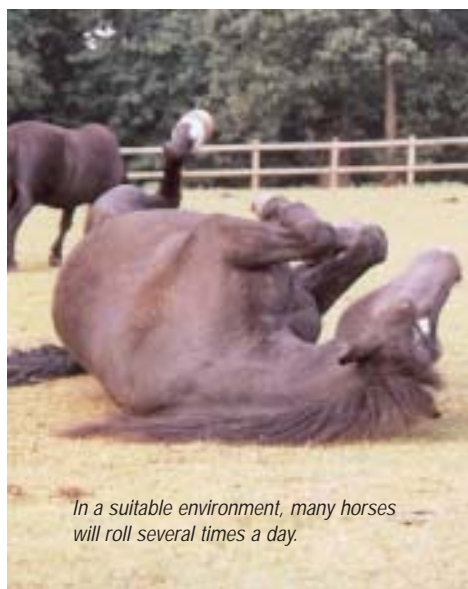
The equine brain is therefore generally preoccupied with eating, assessing what is happening around them and co-ordinating the body to move very quickly if necessary.

They are also much more active and alert than the average human, only sleeping for a total of 2-3 hours each day, made up of several short naps, often taken standing up.

At Redwings, we provide permanent turnout within a herd environment for all our equines. This enables them to enjoy several essential elements of a natural lifestyle:

Space

At an instinctive level, space is very reassuring for the average equine. It means that they can see what is happening around them and have the room to run away should danger present itself. If threatened, humans will aim for small, enclosed spaces, horses will aim for the wide open areas.



In a suitable environment, many horses will roll several times a day.

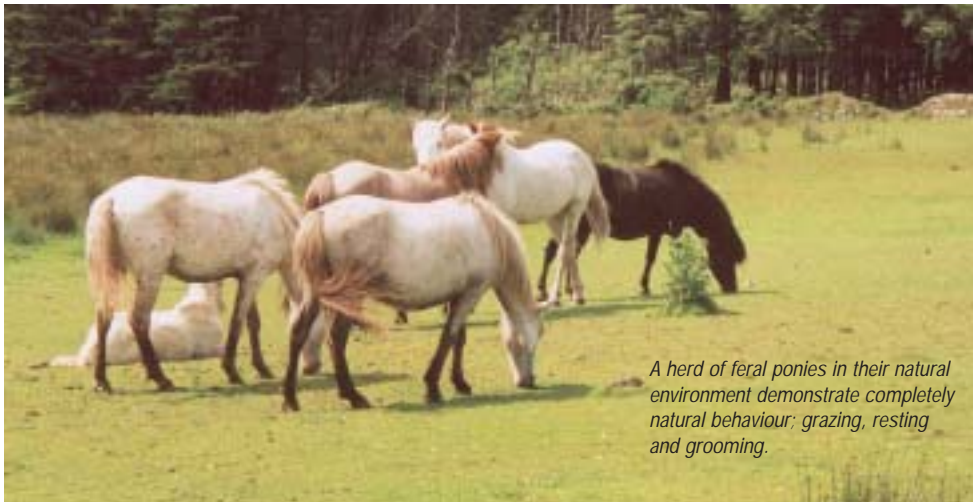
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Space also allows an animal to decide its' own level of activity and interaction with companions. Redwings is a retirement sanctuary and believes this ability to choose their own routine benefits all equines. Young animals can burn up energy and play together in one paddock, whilst in another equines with conditions like arthritis, navicular or tendonitis can exercise gently, as much or as little as they wish. Equines with breathing problems or stable vices also benefit enormously from permanent turnout. By providing both natural and manmade shelter, equines can also make their own choices in different weather conditions.

Grazing

For an animal that instinctively wants to spend at least two thirds of its' life eating, little and often really is the key to health and

happiness. Grass and hay have a low nutritional content and this means the equine has to eat much more of it in order to obtain the energy and nourishment needed to maintain health and condition. The equine body is designed to thrive on this type of diet and the digestive system works most effectively if it is provided with regular, small amounts of food that has a high fibre content, as grass and hay both do. This basic management approach therefore addresses two fundamental equine needs; the physical need for a diet which maintains healthy digestion and the instinctive need to graze. Although food intake must always be regulated to maintain a horse's ideal weight, any dietary program should be approached from this essential starting point. Strip grazing, grazing muzzles and woodchip paddocks can all help control weight and reduce



A herd of feral ponies in their natural environment demonstrate completely natural behaviour: grazing, resting and grooming.

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By living in a small herd, this group of Redwings' ponies have the freedom to behave naturally. Compare this photo to the one on the previous page.



the risk of laminitis whilst allowing the equine to benefit from turnout and a natural diet.

Although Redwings has adopted a very natural environment for its' residents, nature is complimented with whatever support may be needed to ensure every equine enjoys health and well-being. Fresh water, field shelters, mineral licks and muck picked, well-managed pasture are standard. Extra feed, forage, medication, rugs, sun visors and therapeutic shoes are readily available when needed. A strict routine of worming, vaccinating, foot trimming and dental checks also maintain the good health of the herds.

Company

Horses, ponies and donkeys are extremely sociable creatures. Their sense of security

is based on being part of a herd and in an uncertain situation they will stick with their group at all costs. Equines also make one or two close friends within the herd who they will stay close to and spend time grooming or playing with. Donkeys in particular establish very strong relationships and should never be kept alone. Many horses and ponies do adapt to a solitary life, but owners and carers should be aware that lack of equine company must be compensated for in some way. Other animals, such as sheep or cows can create a 'herd' environment, but elements of interaction such as mutual grooming will still be missing. Without other forms of company, humans will become the only herd an equine has, and time spent with the single horse at ground level becomes especially important.

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Stabling

Although turn out is the basis of Redwings' horse management system, every farm is equipped with a number of stables. A horse, pony or donkey may be brought into a stable for several reasons. Laminitis, other forms of lameness, colic, diarrhoea or open wounds may all prompt our veterinary team to prescribe a period of box rest for treatment, observation and convalescence. Equines that suffer from aggressive sweet itch or sunburn can be brought in on certain days to protect them from insects or strong sunlight. Horses may also be brought into a stable for clinical tests or to prepare them for surgery.

A stable is an important asset for any equine management routine. A few

important considerations can make time in their stable a healthier, more comfortable experience for any equine.

Size is important. As a basic rule, the bigger the stable, the happier the resident. It is essential that a horse can comfortably turn round, lie down and even roll if they want to. Larger stables also allow for better air circulation, reduced stress levels and the ability to accommodate more than one equine if required. Naturally, the people who muck out the stable and pay for bedding will have to look carefully at the practical implications too!

Good **ventilation** is vital for equines who are naturally an outdoor animal. Ventilation should provide good circulation, not a draught, and this will help avoid a build up



Mutual grooming not only reinforces friendship bonds between equines, it has also been shown to slow their heart rate and reduce stress levels.

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of dust, heat and ammonia fumes, all of which can aggravate breathing problems. Professional stable manufacturers should be able to provide advice about ventilation.

Horses rely on good **visibility** to feel they are in a position to spot danger and move away from it. The better their visibility from a stable, the more relaxed they will feel. They will also benefit from being able to watch things happening around them, which can help alleviate boredom and isolation. Small ponies and donkeys, who cannot see over the average stable door, should have some provision made to allow them to see outside.



Natural light, ventilation, space, company and a view all help these Redwings' donkeys relax during their stay in a stable.

Fitting windows will help visibility and make the stable lighter too. Just a carefully situated open space will help improve air

circulation and bring inside the sounds and smells which stimulate the equine mind. Glass is potentially very dangerous and should be protected with bars or removed.

Any donkey that is brought into a stable at Redwings will always have a close friend brought in for **company**. Some horses will also suffer separation anxiety if their best friend is not close by and in such cases the two will either share a suitable stable or be put in adjacent stables where they can easily see and touch each other.

Thinking Naturally

Not many owners of horses, ponies and donkeys have access to the kind of facilities and resources that Redwings is able to provide for its' residents. Personal circumstances, practical limitations and the individual quirks of some animals will all need to be taken in to account and the success of any system should be constantly monitored and altered if necessary. But by understanding that the psychological and physical health of a horse, pony or donkey is still firmly rooted in the nomadic lifestyle of its' ancestors, the factors which affect every equine's health and happiness can be properly addressed.

Redwings Welfare Contacts

The following are useful sources of further information:

Kelly Marks

Intelligent Horsemanship

Lethornes

Lambourne

Berkshire

RG17 8QS

www.intelligenthorsemanship.co.uk

‘The Horse Whisperer’ by Monty Roberts

‘The Nature of Horses’ by Stephen Budiansky

‘The Horse Behaviour Handbook’ by Abigail Hogg

British Equine Veterinary Association

Wakefield House

46 High Street

Sawston

Cambridge CB2 4BG

01223 836970

www.beva.org.uk

Redwings Horse Sanctuary

Hapton

Norwich

NR15 1SP

Horse Care and Welfare 01508 481008

General Enquiries 01508 481000

www.redwings.co.uk

Redwings Welfare Information

Redwings' Welfare Team is proactive in the promotion of equine care and welfare, believing that access to accurate and up-to-date information is vital if owners and carers are to meet the needs of their animal.

Redwings' welfare leaflets are designed to provide an overview of many important issues which are encountered regularly in welfare cases with which the Sanctuary is involved. The series includes information on the following topics:

- **Laminitis**
- **Hoof Care and Farriery**
- **Worms and De-worming**
- **Food, Digestion and Energy**
- **Veteran Horses and Retirement**
- **Horse Psychology**
- **Donkeys**
- **Equine Welfare and the Law**

To request copies of leaflets or to speak to one of the team about any equine welfare issues, please feel free to contact the department by post, phone or email.

The Welfare Team

Redwings Horse Sanctuary

Hapton

Norwich

NR15 1SP

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