



Horse Behaviour Checklist

All horse owners, riders and keepers should be able to recognise subtle signs of pain or discomfort in the horses in their care. If your horse is exhibiting behaviours such as stereotypic behaviours or aggression to other horses or people, then you should contact an equine behaviour professional to help you identify the cause of their behaviour and appropriate management techniques. The checklist below provides some examples of more subtle signs of pain, discomfort, or stress and some of the potential causes. This list is not exhaustive, and the behaviours and causes may vary from horse to horse.

To complete the table, review the statement in the left-hand column and put a tick in the box which matches best how often your horse performs the behaviour. Tally up how many ticks are in each of the columns at the end.

Behaviour	How often is the behaviour performed?			What might this tell us about how the horse feels?
	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	
Moves away from you when being groomed				That the horse might be experiencing pain or discomfort in area of the body you were grooming, fear of people or what is about to happen
Moves away from you when being tacked up				That their tack may need to be adjusted or they associate being ridden with pain, discomfort or stress, fear of people or what is about to happen
Puts ears back when saddle is put on or girth is done up				That their tack may need to be adjusted or they associate being ridden with pain, discomfort or stress
Turns away from you when you enter their stable				That they associate leaving the stable to be turned out or ridden with pain or discomfort, fear of people or what is about to happen

Continued overleaf





Behaviour	How often is the behaviour performed?			What might this tell us about how the horse feels?
	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	
Can take a couple of attempts to catch them in their field				That they may not like coming into their stable, that they do not want to leave their herd mates, or they associate coming in with pain, discomfort, previous memory of a stressful experience or fear of a person
Snatches one or more feet away when picking out hooves				That there may be pain or discomfort in one of their limbs or when they have to balance on 3 limbs
Tail swishing when groomed and/or tacked up				That the horse might be experiencing pain or discomfort in area of the body you were grooming or associate tack with pain, discomfort or stress
Lifts head up high or away when you put bridle on				That the fit of the bridle and suitability of the bit may not be appropriate, that they are head shy (fear of head being touched) or they associate being ridden with pain, discomfort or stress
Rushes to the front of the stable or out of the stable when the door is opened				That they find their stable environment restrictive and/or they don't have enough turnout
Guarding their feed bowl or hay net				That they feel their food may be taken away from them and/or they aren't being fed enough/appropriately

Continued overleaf





Behaviour	How often is the behaviour performed?			What might this tell us about how the horse feels?
	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	
Not interacting with the rest of the herd when turned out				That they don't want other herd members close to groom or play due to pain, discomfort or stress. That they are bullied away from resources such as hay which may make them fearful of other horses.
Spooks when being led (with no obvious external cause)				Reactivity can be caused by pain or discomfort or if the horse finds their surroundings restrictive or stressful.
Stops when being led				That they don't want to leave a safe space and go where you are taking them, that they are experiencing pain, discomfort or associate where you are taking them with a stressful experience.
Total				<i>Count how many ticks are in each column</i>

Continued overleaf





If your horse rarely performs any of the behaviours in the checklist, then your horse is likely to be happy in their management routine and lifestyle.

If your horse performs any of the above behaviours occasionally or frequently, it would be beneficial to review their management and ask for help from relevant professionals. For example, if your horses are displaying signs of pain or discomfort, then it is important to have them examined by your vet and/or qualified veterinary physiotherapist. If they react to having any part of their tack applied, then you should also have their bridle, bit and saddle (including girth) checked by a qualified tack fitter.

If your horse performs any of the behaviours frequently, we strongly advise you seek further veterinary advice as soon as possible.

Behaviours associated with restricted management, stress, pain or discomfort can escalate as time progresses, especially if the root cause is not addressed promptly. It is important to monitor your horse's behaviour and note (mentally or write in a log) any changes in their behaviour or any behaviours associated with stress, pain or discomfort. It is also important to note that the behaviour of 'quiet' horses can actually be a mechanism for coping with stressful situations. In these scenarios, the horse is shut down and shows little to no reaction to their environment or interest in interacting with other horses and/or people. Distinguishing these 'shut down' horses from content but quiet horses, and determining the cause of their stress, pain or discomfort, can be very difficult, but the first step is being aware of this as a possibility. If you have any queries about your horse's behaviour, [seek advice from a qualified and experienced equine behaviour professional](#).

