



# Beadle Lake Large Animal Clinic

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## Keep Your Horse Happy and Healthy All Winter Long

Is your horse ready for winter? If you are not sure, it may be a good time to schedule an appointment or give us a call. Below are a few points to help you decide if your horse will be happy and healthy all winter long. These points are especially important for older horses and hard keepers.

**First**, assess your horse's **body condition**. Please check our website for a guide on body condition scoring. Your horse may not be ready for winter if it has a body condition score of 4 or less. To help your horse maintain or gain weight through the winter months, please consider nutrition, dentistry and parasitism. Many horses need increased feed to maintain proper weight and digestive absorption in colder weather since horses are continually burning calories to stay warm. Sometimes we forget about parasite control in the winter months. Remember that older or younger horses are more susceptible to parasitism than healthy middle aged horses. Please consider bringing in a manure sample for evaluation of parasites if your horse is having trouble maintaining weight, has a poor hair coat, decreased energy, or is generally a poor doer. Another consideration is dentistry. Routine dentistry and oral exams are essential to proper feed utilization and the general health of your horse. We recommend yearly oral examinations and dental floating. If your horse is dropping food, not maintaining weight, or has oral discomfort when eating or being ridden, it is most likely time to have an oral exam performed.

**Second, healthy joints** are essential to the comfort of your horse especially in the winter months. In the cold weather, horses with degenerative joint disease (arthritis) seem to have a more difficult time moving around. Proper joint health in aging animals is important to keeping them comfortable. Joint supplements can be helpful for maintaining joint health and reducing pain.

**Third**, in the winter, as horse owners, we get cold, so we close up our barns or even heat the barn. Although a warm barn is in our best interest, it is not in your horse's best interest. Remember that horses remain comfortable in much colder temperatures than we do. Adequate **barn ventilation** is essential to a healthy respiratory tract in your horse so keep your barn doors open whenever possible. You may have inadequate ventilation in your barn if you have horses frequently coughing or if your barn smells of ammonia. Maintaining a good environment for your equine partner is very important to your horse's health.

**Finally, do not forget to continue to touch your horse throughout the winter to better gauge body condition through its fuzzy winter coat or blanket.**