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Winter Horse Care

Winter brings along things we need to monitor more closely to keep our horses healthy and happy. Find several important tips below. These tips are especially important for older horses and hard keepers. Do not forget to continue to touch your horse throughout the winter to better gauge body condition through its fuzzy winter coat or blanket.

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, keeping water available is very important. No one likes to break ice all winter, so consider getting heated buckets or tank de-icers. A horse would rather drink warm water as opposed to cold, frozen water. Lack of water can lead to **dehydration**, which can **lead to colic**. A horse should consume around 1gallon of water for every 100 pounds of body weight.

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.

Fourth, **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.

