

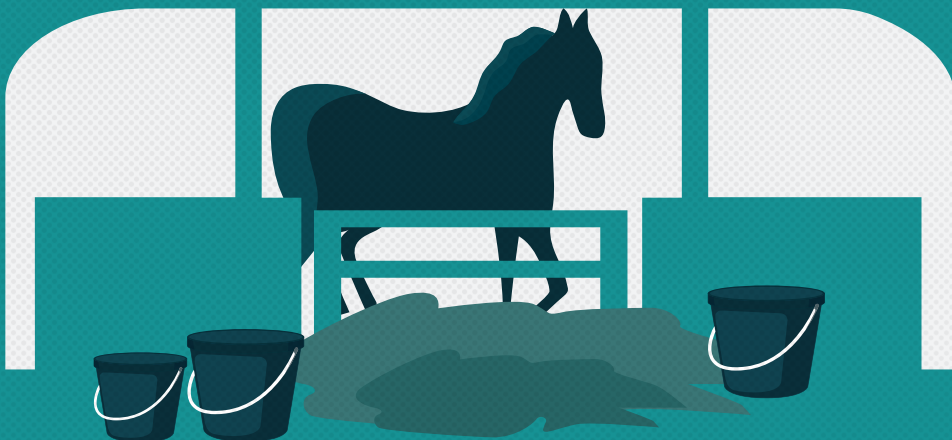


WHAT CAN HORSES TEACH US ABOUT COPING WITH STRESS DURING LOCKDOWN?

Strength and Learning Through Horses help people to understand their own emotions and behaviours by working with horses and thinking about how human and horse behaviour and emotions are similar.

If a horse gets injured or sick we often have to confine them to their stables for weeks or months until they are healed (we call this box rest).

We've been thinking about how this confinement can cause stress in horses and how this is similar to the experience of people all over the world at the moment during COVID19 lockdown. We hope the thoughts are useful in helping you think about and manage stress.



WHAT MAKES STABLE CONFINEMENT REST AND LOCKDOWN STRESSFUL?

HORSES

Horses can get stressed when confined to their stables because they aren't allowed to do things that usually help them feel safe, relaxed and happy:



They can't move around



They can't spend time with their friends



They don't have their usual routine

PEOPLE

Humans can get stressed on lockdown because they can't do things they usually do that help them feel safe, relaxed, and happy:



They can't move around



They don't have their usual routine



They might have less personal space at home than usual



They can't spend time with their friends

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS ON MOOD OR BEHAVIOUR?

HORSES



MOOD

Mood swings, feeling anxious and stress

BEHAVIOUR

Change in normal personality traits or behaviours - they can become more aggressive, have a lot more energy or a lot less energy than normal.

WHAT DO WE SEE IN THE HORSE'S BODY WHEN IT IS FEELING STRESSED?

Tense muscles; Quick breathing rate; Difficulty staying still; Eyes open wide; Head held high; Not sleeping as much as usual.

PEOPLE



MOOD

Mood swings, feeling anxious, frustrated, or lower mood than usual

BEHAVIOUR

Change in normal behaviour – people have more or less energy than usual and might be quieter or more aggressive than usual. They might cry more. They might have difficulty concentrating, remembering things, or sleeping. They might eat more or less than usual.

WHAT MIGHT PEOPLE NOTICE IN THEIR BODY WHEN THEY ARE FEELING STRESSED?

Tense muscles, 'tingling' or feeling numb, breathing more quickly, sweating more, difficulties staying still, feeling sick, stomach ache or diarrhea, headaches.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LESS HELPFUL WAYS OF MANAGING STRESS? WHY ARE THEY UNHELPFUL?

HORSES



Addictive, repetitive behaviours, like walking in circles, rocking backwards and forwards or side to side, or windsucking (sucking air into their throats).

These behaviours make the horses feel immediately better by releasing stress releasing chemicals but cause long term problems such as injuries, stomach and teeth problems.

PEOPLE

When people feel stressed, they often do things that make them feel better in the short term, but that make them feel worse in the long term, like:



Eating sugary foods. We get a 'sugar high' and feel a bit better, then we get a 'sugar low' that makes us feel much worse



Connecting to friends on social media can help us feel better, but spending a lot of time on social media can make us feel anxious, frustrated and depressed

WHAT ARE SOME HELPFUL WAYS OF COPING WITH STRESS?

ALL HORSES ARE DIFFERENT

We have to work out what is best for each horse by making a change, and watch to see how their mood improves. We should constantly assess their bodies and behaviours for signs of stress and aim to intervene as early as possible to help them.



We also change our expectations of the horse's behaviour when they are on box rest, especially for younger horses. We might think about some basic ground rules (like no biting, kicking) but allow some (non-harmful) behaviours we wouldn't usually allow (like chewing soft lead ropes)

We can try to make their environment & routine as relaxing & distracting as possible:

1

Some prefer a quiet place. Others prefer to see people and horses coming and going and doing things.

2

Try different stable layouts
Stable toys and other sort of stimulation they enjoy (some horses like different sorts of music!)

3

Bring a friend nearby for company

4

Find out what routine, food, and training regime makes them feel the best (they might be better behaved if they are groomed after exercise)

ALL PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT, TOO!



You might need to try different things to find out what helps you feel more relaxed. Reducing things that make us feel worse:

1

Reduce sugary foods and try other things that help you feel relaxed or more energetic



2

News reports can feel overwhelming at the moment. Try limiting time on the news - e.g. 10 minutes twice a day



3

Clean up and limit social media. Try spending less time online, take a break, follow accounts that make you feel good, mute/unfollow accounts that don't



4

See if different spaces at home help you feel more relaxed – is there a room or chair you like best? Can you make more space (try tidying or moving things)?



ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF MANAGING STRESS:



1

A routine – try planning your days - keep sleeping, washing and eating times the same, but vary other activities

2

Relaxation, mindfulness, yoga - try a free app or YouTube video

3

If you can, try looking for trees, plants, animals or birds on a walk down your street – being in nature can help us relax

4

Exercise – dancing can be as good as a run for reducing stress

5

Write down how you're feeling or talk to friends and family

6

Look at photos or things that remind you of happy memories

7

Try doing things you enjoy - drawing/reading/games/dancing

8

Try different tastes, smells, or sensations that help you feel relaxed - perfume, shower gels, sucking a mint, squeezing a ball, listening to music or different soundscapes on youtube (e.g. a cafe or the seaside), having a warm (or cold!) shower or bath