



### Understanding your Horse's Defence (Healing) System

Your horses' body knows how to heal itself. When unwell it works hard to restore order and balance to help reclaim a natural state of health.

Here are a few ways the healing system works to safeguard health. It:

- Expands and contracts blood vessels to increase the blood flow around the body and to specific areas that need healing
- Speeds the heart rate and increases the strength of its contractions to deliver more blood, oxygen and nutrients to specific sites that need healing
- Increases breathing rate and capacity to bring more oxygen to the cells and tissues
- Stimulates the glands to produce key hormones to initiate growth and to repair the cells of any damaged tissues
- Increases body temperature to cause fever and induces sweating when there is an infection. Fevers will heat up the body and kill the offending organisms and the sweating will eliminate the toxins. The immunologic defenders (white blood cells) eat and destroy bacteria more efficiently at higher body temperatures. Fevers are good for horses that have bacterial illness
- Modifies kidney function to reduce urine output and help to conserve water if dehydrated
- Remodels bones bringing damaged bones back together
- Causes sneezing which is a response that expels foreign debris, flushes out irritants, removes potential pathogens, rids the horse's body of disease helping the body to maintain its integrity
- Causes coughing which expels debris and invading microorganisms that have penetrated deeper into the respiratory system which has the potential to cause damage to the lungs. By removing this debris it clears the airways for easier breathing



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- Produces diarrhoea to eliminate toxins and contaminated material from the colon and large intestine. Diarrhoea is a very effective way of flushing the system. Suppressing this body function can be dangerous and doing so can often backfire
- Produces pus which is produced to help eliminate foreign material it commonly occurs with infections, the fluid is secreted to flush out the debris and microorganisms. Pus contains white blood cells and digestive enzymes that breaks down and digests foreign material. It will attempt to kill and/or digest the bacteria and flush out infection
- Increases the secretions of mucous, phlegm and congestion which are the healing systems way of attempting to flush out any offending organisms and foreign invaders that may have invaded the entrance of the respiratory tract. Suppressing can prolong illness and can even make things worse
- Produces swelling which is the result of increased fluids from the lymphatic system, leaky blood vessels and other soft tissues. This fluid helps immobilise the site and serves as a shock absorber to prevent further injury to the site
- Produces redness which is an inflammation. The redness is often painful and represents an increased blood flow to the area. The body is bringing chemicals to the injured site to help to remove toxins, repair damaged tissues and speed healing
- Produces tears to flush foreign material and microorganisms out of the sensitive surfaces of the eye

The horse's body monitors all processes of repair, growth, restoration of health and the normal functioning of its cells, tissues and organs. The healing system permeates every organ and tissue. It is not confined to just one structure or location.

The lungs and large intestine organ systems are the first line of defence. The lungs are not only the organs that inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide but they also form lung and protective energy (chi). The immune system is dependent on the strength of



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the lungs to create 'protective energy' which forms a protective shield on the surface of the body that resists external pathogenic factors from invading the body. Additionally the lungs can inhale toxins and they must be strong enough to exhale both external toxins and internal body toxins. The lung organs also regulate water passage throughout the body.

The large intestine is responsible for collecting and excreting material waste that the horse's body produces. Both the lungs and large intestines work in concert with all of the other internal organs systems. Together the lungs and the large intestine provide air, oxygen, nutrients, protective energy and an ongoing process of cleaning the body.

The second line of defence is to support the horse's stomach and spleen for the ingesting of food substances, nutrients and water. Because the horse's stomach is only 10% of the whole digestive system it is very vulnerable to disturbances. The horse's stomach and spleen energy must function well to be able to deal with the many environmental hazards that cause digestion and nutrient absorption problems.

Horses spend much of their lives consuming environmental toxins by way of forage and water. The stomach is the holding basin where food and water lie for a time before the spleen breaks down that food and water (ripening and rotting) into highly refined nutrient energy so that it can be absorbed by the body systems. If there is an imbalance in the functioning of the stomach and/or spleen the horse may be weak or lethargic and his muscle tone may suffer. His ability to focus during training and his entire healing process may become compromised.

To deal directly with the environmental toxins we need to support the horses liver functions. The liver is responsible for cleaning and replenishing the blood as well as providing a harmonious flow of energy to all parts of the body. When the liver is overburdened with toxins the horse's blood suffers and their blood and energy will not circulate properly. Optimal liver function is essential to having a healthy horse.



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The immune system is concerned with defending the body against infections. It attacks and protects the body from foreign invaders. The healing system is responsible for repairing tissue damage from injuries or illness and restoring the body to its natural state of health. It focuses on healing, growth, regeneration, restoration and maintaining health. Most diseases and injuries are not caused by infections. Both systems work together to fight against, neutralise and remove infectious agents to prevent further damage to the body.

The horse's health is less likely to be compromised and they are better able to cope with what the environment presents if their immune system is strong. Viruses and infections can usually be fought off by an immune system that is functioning at optimum strength but a weakened immune system is far more vulnerable to attack from outside influences. It is vital therefore to maintain the body in optimum condition through good nutrition, suitable environment and correct exercise levels. Do not make the mistake, though, of assuming that super fit is also super healthy.

### Tips for Fuelling the Healing System

The choices you make can have a serious impact on your horse's health and performance. You should:

- Provide good quality food that contains the right nutrients. If you have more than one horse feed them as individuals
- Ensure that they get enough exercise especially if they are stabled
- Ensure that they get enough rest as rest is a great healer
- Provide them with clean fresh water
- Provide them with fresh air
- Provide them with clean shelters, stables etc
- Allow them to develop effective social skills with their companions
- Have the right mental attitude and positive thoughts when handling and/or training



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- NEVER ignore their needs
- Minimise any stress in their lives
- Remove harmful substances from the environment and their diet, where possible

Honour and take care of them. Understand the relationship between their mind, body, emotions and spirit. These are intimately connected. Open the door to better communication and cooperation and learn to listen and watch for any signs. You need to create as natural and as balanced equine lifestyle as possible. These tips will go a long way to having happy and healthy horses.

Always utilise the natural elements around you that support the healing system. Air provides oxygen; the sun provides cycles, vitamin D to lift the mood, support the endocrine system and help to heal wounds; water provides rehydration and provides fluid to the horse's body systems and improves elimination of toxins and can be used to clean wounds; the earth provides you with salt, clay (which can speed the healing of insect bites, abscesses, boils and many other skin conditions) and plants to support and assist the healing system.