

## Tips for Caring for the Older Horse

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With advances in today's nutrition, management, and health care, horses are living longer, more useful lives. It is not uncommon to find horses and ponies living well into their 20s and 30s or more. While genetics play a role in determining lifespan, caregivers can have a significant impact.

You may think that turning your old-timer out to pasture is the kindest form of retirement, but horses are individuals. Some enjoy being idle; others prefer to be a part of the action.

***Whatever you do, don't ignore the horse!*** Proper nutrition, care and exercise will help the horse thrive.

Here are some recommendations for caring for your older horse:

1. Observe your horse on a regular basis- every day if possible. Watch for changes in attitude, body condition, and behavior. Address any issues right away.
2. Feed a high quality diet. Do NOT give dusty or moldy feeds.
3. Feed your older horse away from younger, aggressive horses so it won't have to compete for food.
4. Feed more frequent meals so as to not upset the digestive system. Two or three times daily is best.
5. Provide plenty of fresh, lukewarm water. Cold water reduces consumption, which can lead to colic and other problems.
6. Adjust and balance rations to maintain proper body condition. A good rule of thumb is to be able to feel the ribs but not see them.
7. Provide adequate, appropriate exercise to maintain muscle tone, flexibility and mobility.
8. Groom your horse frequently to promote circulation and skin health.
9. Have an annual dental done by your veterinarian to check for any ulcers or worn teeth.
10. Annual vaccinations for tetanus, sleeping sickness, rhino, flu, and Potomac, with additional recommendations by your vet as indicated by the animals' environment.
11. Routine deworming should be integral part of care.
12. Be aware that older horses (especially grays) are prone to tumors. Look for any unusual lumps or growths from head to tail, and underneath tail.
13. Schedule routine check-ups with your veterinarian. Call immediately if you suspect a problem or issue.