



Vital Signs

Know what's normal for your horse so you can quickly determine if he's not feeling right and can give an accurate assessment to your veterinarian. Take your horse's vital signs when he's resting and calm several times over the course of a week to determine what's normal for him. Then fill in your horse's name and record his vitals on the chart so you'll have them handy in case of an emergency.

Normal Vitals for an Adult Horse:

Temperature: 99° to 101° F.

Pulse: 28 to 40 beats per minute resting heart rate.

Respiration: 12 to 15 breaths per minute resting respiration rate.

Mucous Membranes of the Mouth: moist, light pink to "bubblegum pink" color.

Capillary Refill Time (CRT): 2 seconds or less.

Gut Sounds: gurgling, rumbles, "growling" sounds, "tinkling" sounds, occasional roaring sounds. Not usually quiet for longer than a couple of minutes.

Normal Vitals for

Name: _____

Temperature: _____ ° F

Pulse: _____ beats per minute

Respiration: _____ breaths per minute

Mucous Membranes of the Mouth:

- moist
- pale pink
- medium pink
- bubblegum pink

Capillary Refill Time (CRT): _____ seconds

Gut Sounds: _____

- gurgling/rumbles
- growling
- tinkling
- roaring

Normal Vitals for

Name: _____

Temperature: _____ ° F

Pulse: _____ beats per minute

Respiration: _____ breaths per minute

Mucous Membranes of the Mouth:

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See page 2 for more information ►

Taking your horse's vital signs:

Take temperature: Lubricate the tip of your thermometer with lubricant or petroleum jelly. (If using a standard veterinary thermometer, be sure to shake it down first.) Then insert one inch into horse's rectum, holding it in place. (The digital version beeps when ready and takes less time than a standard veterinary thermometer.) Because temps can rise by 2 degrees in the late afternoon, establish a baseline of what's normal by taking your horse's temperature two to three times a day for a week.

Check pulse: Place the bell of a stethoscope into your horse's left "armpit" and count the beats per minute. Each "lub-dub" counts as one beat. Pulse rate increases noticeably when a horse is nervous or in distress.

Check respiratory rate: Count the number of breaths per minute by watching the nostrils flare or the flanks move. (If the horse is sniffing something, this will be far more rapid than normal breathing.)

Check capillary refill time (CRT) and gum color: Lift the upper lip and check the color of the gums directly above the teeth. To check CRT, press your finger firmly on the gum in this area. Release pressure and count how many seconds it takes to turn pink again. (Count "one thousand one, one thousand two ...")

Check gut sounds: Press your ear or a stethoscope against the horse's abdomen on both sides and in several sites (high flank, low flank, between flank and ribs, low belly and midline of belly). Listen for a minimum of 30 seconds in each location, preferably longer. If everything is working as it should, you'll hear sounds several times per minute.

Skin pinch test for dehydration: Gently but firmly pinch a "tent" of skin on your horse's neck just above where the neck joins the shoulder. Skin should quickly spring back into place and the "tent" will disappear if horse is normal and well hydrated. If the skin stays tented for a second or more, the horse may already be dehydrated.

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