



Strong bonds are
built with great care.™

Hydration

#1 Tip

Quick Check: Is Your Horse Dehydrated?

Here are two quick checks you can do anywhere to determine if your horse is dehydrated or on his way to dehydration. Do the “skin response test,” also known as a “pinch test.” With your thumb and forefinger, pinch out a bit of skin in the middle third of your horse’s neck or over the point of the shoulder, then release it. With most well-hydrated horses, the skin flattens almost instantly or at least within a second. If the pinched area stays “tented” and settles back slowly, this tells you the horse may be already dehydrated or is on his way to dehydration. Then check capillary refill time (CRT) by lifting the horse’s lip and firmly pressing your thumb against his gum. This pushes blood out of the capillaries and leaves a white mark from the thumb pressure. In a hydrated horse, the white mark immediately “pinks up” within about one second of releasing pressure. If it takes two seconds, your horse is likely on his way to dehydration. If it takes three seconds or longer for the spot to become pink again, your horse is already seriously dehydrated.

#2 Tip

Eating on the Trail Helps with Hydration

Many horse owners enforce a “no eating while riding” rule, but if you’re on a long trail ride (two hours or more), you should rethink this. Eating encourages drinking, so to help your horse stay hydrated, let him eat. This doesn’t mean you have to let him snatch mouthfuls of grass any time he wants, but you should make it a point to stop and let him graze for a few minutes every hour or so. Although it may not provide a great deal of nutrients, having some food in his digestive system will motivate him to drink. Speaking of which, stop and allow your horse to drink any time you encounter a good source of water along the trail. You can be asking for trouble if you go ride for several hours—especially in hot weather—and your horse has no forage or water during that entire time.