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**HORSE CARE
ISSUE**

Hydrating For Peak Performance

Getting your horse to drink when you're far from home can be difficult, and it's a problem horse owners at all levels face. From experts to the grassroots, we collected tips and tricks to convince Dobbin to take the plunge.

BY MICHELLE HAND

There's a reason the old maxim, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," endures.

Greater meaning aside, sometimes horses just choose not to drink, especially when they're under stress due to travel and competition and faced with unfamiliar water.

But the importance of a well-watered horse is undeniable.

"Horses that are hydrated can perform to the peak of their ability, whereas when they're dehydrated, they can't," said Mike Tomlinson, DVM, who has been a team veterinarian at three FEI World Equestrian Games and was the chef d'equipe for the U.S. endurance team.

Part of this is linked to encouraging effective muscle function, lactic acid clearance and electrolyte

balance, according to Christiana Ober, DVM, who was the Canadian eventing team's head veterinarian until 2015, when she joined Team New Zealand. She also works alongside her husband, Andre Buthe, at his Andre Buthe Equine Clinic, Ltd. in Dunmow, England.

In the worst-case scenario, dehydration can cause impaction colic, but Tomlinson pointed to overlooked subclinical factors of dehydration as well. "Food doesn't move through the bowels of the horse very well when it's dry," he said. "The horse may not be colicking, but they can't jump as high, they can't run as fast, and they can't do a half-pass as well, because when they cross their legs, their stomach hurts."

But convincing horses to drink more is the trick, isn't it?

"Every horse has a different thing they like," said Tomlinson with a laugh. He pointed to variables such as temperatures, tastes and even toys in the water bucket.

"Figure out what motivates your horse at home and plan ahead," he said.

When Ober is getting ready to ship a horse over land or sea, she uses this tip to help with proper hydration. "There are so many excellent commercially available electrolytes. We dose the horses by oral administration the night before traveling and then give them access to fresh water, ideally for eight hours before they get on the trailer," she said.

Denise Moriarty, groom to Olympic show jumper Kent Farrington, also uses electrolytes, although she favors a daily supplement.

"We change the water buckets every day, and we scrub them once a week," she said. "The horses obviously won't want to drink if there is dust and things from the stables in the buckets. When it's hot, we change the water more often so that it stays cooler, and I often put apples in their water. They bob for the apples and take in water to get to it! We also give them IV fluids and feed them bran/grain mashes when it's particularly hot outside."

► How Do You Know When Enough Is Enough?

"At an event, a horse should drink at least as much as they drink at home," said C. Mike Tomlinson, DVM. He recommends against automatic waterers for sport horses, because they make it difficult to know what's normal for your horse.

"Every horse is different, and you need to know how much your horse drinks at home," Tomlinson said. "Then, you know the minimum of how much they should drink at an event. They should drink more at an event. They're sweating, [and] they're exercising more, especially if it's hot."

Christiana Ober, DVM, also highlighted the importance of knowing your horse's drinking patterns. "Do they prefer to drink overnight? Do they just drink around meals?" she asked.

Knowing these patterns will make it easier to encourage your horse to drink appropriately and is an excellent way to monitor if your horse is becoming dehydrated.

Ober also suggested some higher tech options such as weighing your horse daily and using a refractometer to test the concentration of the horse's urine.

"Often, weight loss within a 24-hour period is related to water loss, but if you don't have access to a scale, a refractometer is a cheap, handheld tool that is quick and easy and can be used by anyone," she said.

Want more tips to get your horse to drink? Read on for reader submitted options.

► "We dissolve salt into a syringe and give it to them orally; it will make them drink within five minutes. We also provide salt blocks in the pasture and stall."

BRIDGETT MCINTOSH,
Ph.D., Equine Nutrition, New York

► "My mare wouldn't drink much when traveling, and we tried different methods for years. She is super-picky, but she absolutely adores Horse Quencher. We put a few handfuls of the apple flavor in her water, and she can't get enough of it!"

COURTNEY WEILER, Indianapolis

► "My boy has a tendency to stop drinking when the weather gets very hot or very windy, and he's colicked several times as a result. I started putting an inch of apple juice in a small bucket and filling it with water, then giving it to him after

every ride as a treat. I always use the same red bucket and that color bucket is never used for anything else. Now, he starts to lick his lips whenever he sees the bucket, and if he stops drinking, I know he'll always drink the apple juice water from that bucket."

SAVANNAH BRENTNALL, Los Angeles

► "Try different water containers; some buckets/troughs give off a taste that horses don't like."

SHAYAN GAJAR, Chantilly, Va.

► "When it's really hot and humid I make alfalfa tea with cold water, but in winter I've made it with warm water. It's basically a few alfalfa cubes soaked [until the cubes completely break up] in a gallon or more of water. The water turns a light green, and they seem to love it."

ANGELA FREDA, New York

► "Make sure the pasture has

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multiple water sources. Horses that are low in the herd hierarchy can sometimes be prevented from drinking by more dominant horses.”

ZOE GREENWOOD, Middleburg, Va.

▶ “A little Gatorade in the water helps!”

TAYLOR ALLEN, Lakeland, Fla.

▶ “I always thought my mare was a finicky drinker in the winter, and, after a few years of it, we scoped her and found ulcers. She was less apt to drink in the winter, because that is when her ulcers bothered her more, as she was foraging less. We treated her ulcers, and she drinks regularly now.”

ASHLEY GONYAW, Washington, Vt.

▶ “Bring both water and a bucket

from home. Water sometimes tastes different at other properties.”

TRACEY ROUSE, Tryon, N.C.

▶ “I trained my mare to drink after every ride. I would untack and bring her back to her paddock. I would stand with her, with her halter and lead still on, until she drank. Now she takes gulps of water on cue!”

BLAIRE ELIZABETH, Port Angeles, Wash.

▶ “I use the ‘Horse Hydrator.’ It’s a water filter that screws right on the end of the hose. My horse will not drink water away from home until he is desperate; with the Horse Hydrator, he drinks plenty. I highly recommend it.”

SARAH GARBER, Bantam, Conn.

▶ “My horses adore peppermint in any form. I add a few drops of peppermint essential oil to their water buckets, and they love it. This really helps when traveling with them, too, as they never seem to notice any changes in water from different places. The peppermint is an added bonus when it is super hot and humid, as it is very cooling and offers great respiratory support. (Oh, and I do not see ANY evidence of raccoons or other pests playing in the outside troughs, either, when I am using peppermint oil.)”

STEVIE NELSON WITT, Cedar, Iowa

▶ “A handful of sweet feed in the water is so simple, but it really works well on many!”

SARAH DUKTI,

DVM, DACVS, DACVECC, Hume, Va.



Good drinking habits begin at home. Some horses prefer a certain type or even color of bucket, so determine what your horse likes best in order to provide that while on the road. MICHELLE HAND PHOTO