

# GUIDANCE ON THE WELFARE OF TREKKING HORSE



Fédération Internationale de Tourisme Equestre





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# GLOSSARY

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**Good Treatment:** An anthropocentric approach focused on human actions aimed at fulfilling animal needs, including appropriate feeding, housing, and care.

**Welfare:** An animal-centred approach (as defined by the French National Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health Safety in 2018) that describes a positive mental and physical state in horses. This state is dependent on the horse's perception of its situation and is linked to the satisfaction of its physiological and behavioural needs.



# INTRODUCTION

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This guide is intended for all outdoor riders who travel the roads, paths, forests, and mountains of the world alongside their faithful companion.

This guide is inspired by directives from national, European, and international legislative measures and scientific protocols concerning animal welfare, as well as recommendations from professionals in the equestrian and tourism sectors. Several measures emanate from these different protocols: establishing a good human-horse relationship; ensuring adequate nutrition; providing an adequate living environment; promoting physical and exploratory activity; facilitating social contacts; ensuring good health; preventing pain and ensuring a dignified end of life.

It is important to remember that in many countries, a rider on horseback or on foot on the road, as well as a carriage, are considered vehicles. As such, they are subject to the same road regulations as motor vehicles.

The International Equestrian Tourism Federation offers this guide on the welfare of trail and outdoor horses as a resource for National Equestrian Tourism Organizations (NETOs). Each NETO is encouraged to adopt, enhance, or adapt it to align with their specific regional requirements and adhere to all applicable national and local regulations.

The FITE strives for the international harmonization of equestrian tourism principles to ensure accessibility, while respecting the unique local characteristics of each country.

# KNOWLEDGE OF THE HORSE

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## 1) Reminder on animal welfare

Animal welfare has emerged as a significant concern for equestrian, professionals and organizations in recent years. It is defined as *"the positive mental and physical state associated with the satisfaction of the animal's physiological and behavioural needs and expectations. This state varies according to the animal's perception of the situation..."*. Consequently, variations in well-being can be observed even among individuals of the same species.

Scientists identify four crucial areas for equine well-being: feeding, housing, health, and behavior. Assessing a horse's well-being requires observing the animal itself and its environment using objective indicators, both positive and negative.

In 1979, the "Farm Animal Welfare Council" developed 5 fundamental freedoms, principles that cannot be compensated for and must be satisfied simultaneously. The European animal welfare program "Welfare Quality"® was inspired by this to decline the following 12 criteria:

5 freedoms (FAWC, 1979)	12 critères (Welfare Quality®)
Freedom from hunger and thirst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ absence of prolonged hunger</li><li>➤ absence of prolonged thirst</li></ul>
Freedom from discomfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ comfort around resting</li><li>➤ Thermal comfort</li><li>➤ Ease of movement</li></ul>
Freedom from pain, injury or disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ absence of injuries</li><li>➤ absence of disease</li><li>➤ absence of pain induced by management procedures</li></ul>
Freedom to express normal behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ expression of social behaviours</li><li>➤ expression of other behaviours</li><li>➤ Good human-animal relationship</li><li>➤ Positive emotional state</li></ul>
Freedom from fear and distress	

For proper observation, one must understand and respect the horse's fundamental needs. These needs, which ensure a healthy and safe environment, can be met through the "Theory of 3F": Food, Friends, and Freedom.

## 2) Theory of 3F

A horse's positive physical and mental state hinges on three fundamental needs: the **provision of adequate and quality forage or long fibers (Food)**, opportunities for **interaction with other horses (Friends)**, and the ability to **move without restriction (Freedom)**.



Naturally, horses graze for around 16 hours daily. This continuous chewing produces saliva, which helps reduce gastric acid in their stomachs and thus reduces the risk of gastric ulcers and colic.

Living outdoors not only enables this natural **grazing behaviour** but also encourages constant **movement**, which is essential for their physical and mental well-being, from their minds to their hooves.

Horses are gregarious animals that thrive on interaction with their own kind. Such interactions provide essential mental, emotional, and physical stimulation, leading to reduced stress and anxiety, fewer health issues, and an enhanced capacity for learning.



### 3) Welfare indicators

However, the provision of fundamental elements is not necessarily synonymous with well-being, and objective indicators are indispensable for evaluating and attesting to a chronic state of well-being: sanitary, behavioural, and physiological indicators. It is important to know how to evaluate the physical and mental condition of your horse in order to adapt its living conditions and activity. This knowledge can allow for quick reactions in case of deterioration of its state.

Sanitary indicators take into account the quality of locomotion as well as the absence of injuries or swollen areas. Irregular gaits, reluctance to move, stiffness, can for example be synonymous with lameness.

Checking friction areas of the equipment and areas stressed by work such as under the saddle, the corners of the lips, at the level of the noseband passage, the girth passage, the limbs, allows for rapid detection of the presence of injuries or wounds.



Other effective indicators allow for monitoring your horse, such as body condition score (BCS) and weight, coat quality (shiny/dull, dull, hair or mane loss, presence of parasites).

Behavioral indicators can potentially indicate a deterioration of the horse's welfare state. They can be expressed by stereotypies (repetitive and invariant behaviors without apparent purpose), aggression towards humans, hypervigilance, or apathy. During ridden work, different indicators such as tail swishing, defensive or resistive behaviors, and facial expressions will allow for evaluating the horse's welfare state.



**Physiological indicators** correspond to the colour of the mucous membranes (eye, gums) which are normally pink, as well as cardiac and respiratory constants (measurable with a heart rate monitor) and body temperature. Blood tests and veterinary examinations such as surface electromyography and electroencephalogram allow for obtaining more advanced results.

### Respiratory rate

#### Normal signs:

- Regular inspirations and expirations
- Respiratory rate: 10 to 14 cycles per minute

#### Abnormal signs:

- 16 cycles per minute at rest
- Dilated nostrils
- Nasal discharge, from a "clear" serous fluid to purulent or blood

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### How to measure heart rate?

With a stethoscope or heart rate monitor, hand flat above the point of the elbow, under the shoulder muscle.

#### Normal signs:

- Horse at rest: 24 to 40 beats per minute (bpm)

After strenuous exercise: up to 160-250 bpm

#### Abnormal sign:

- 44 bpm at rest

Regarding **hydration**, it is important to remember that a horse drinks about 30 L of water per day. In hot weather or during intense activity, this quantity can double or even triple, so it can drink up to 60 or even 90 litres of water per day. To check its hydration, it is possible to perform the "skin pinch test".

#### Skin turgor test

- Pinch a fold of skin at the base of the neck for a few seconds.
- When you release the skin, it should immediately return to its initial position. If the skin fold persists for more than 2 seconds, it is a sign that your horse is severely dehydrated.

#### 4) Seasonal precautions

Good practices to adopt during **hot weather**:

- Monitor hydration (water at will, fresh and clean, skin pinch test).
- Shower regularly (be careful of thermal shock, prefer lukewarm water and a gradual shower: from bottom to top, insisting on the chest and the inside of the limbs and avoiding the kidneys). Using a soaked sponge also works to cool the animal.
- Provide a shaded resting area and prioritize outings in the forest during the "cool" hours of the day.
- Facilitate post-exertion recovery using movement or restraint techniques.
- Control mineral intake (supplement with electrolytes).
- Prevent sunburn (sunscreen without preservatives, without perfumes on sensitive areas).
- Prevent insects (fly masks/protection; repellents).



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Good practices to adopt during **winter**:

- Provide shelters.
- Monitor water consumption (check water troughs and be careful of water that is too cold).
- Increase forage intake. Eating triggers heat production.
- Promote a long and progressive warm-up.
- Let your horse find the rhythm and path that will give it the best balance.
- Maintain hooves: shoeing adapted to the hardness of the ground, studs, etc.
- Pay increased attention to skin conditions and general hoof health.
- Adjust and check blankets at least once a day.

### Good to know

- The body temperature of an adult horse is normally between 37.5°C and 38.5°C.
- Regular temperature taking allows for rapid detection of anomalies.
- The horse's thermal comfort zone is between 5°C and 25°C.

At the end of winter, it is recommended to have a complete health check-up before resuming outdoor outings, including:

- Reasoned vaccination and deworming (after a coproscopy, for example)
- Equine osteopath
- Equine dentist
- Farrier (every 6 to 8 weeks depending on the condition of the horses' hooves)

# PHYSICAL TRAINING OF THE HORSE

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It is important to learn how to **manage your horse's effort** over a full day because a young horse may be susceptible to expending a lot of energy during its first rides as it will encounter many new elements. **Immobility at the mounting block, respect for gaits**, and the establishment of **precise codes** to refine direction are also key elements of the outdoor horse's job.



In the wild, a horse travels an average of 15 to 17 km per day to find its resources. In domestic conditions, because humans often bring their resources to the same close points, the domestic horse with limited space will travel approximately 7.5 km per day. However, **physical training for long-distance** rides and each long-distance outing must be a well-managed combination of **different gaits** including **little gallop** to limit fatigue and anticipate recovery.

As for the **distances** to be covered, they can **vary** enormously from one horse to another depending on its capacities, its physical and sanitary conditions, its age, its training and experience, the weather conditions, and finally the experience of its rider.

## Good to know:

A horse has an average gait of:

- ♦ walk: 3.2 to 6.4 km/h
- ♦ trot: 12.8 to 19.2 km/h
- ♦ working gallop: 16 to 27.2 km/h
- ♦ gallop: 30 to 48 km/h.





Here are some general elements on the physical preparation of the horse for sports performance, which can also apply if long rides or itinerant routes are planned:

In general, it takes more than three months, based on **3 to 4 weekly sessions**, to observe the first effects of a well-conducted physical preparation and more than a year for the body to have made all the necessary changes to sustainably maintain the benefit.

For a training program to be effective, it is necessary to organize **regular, monitored, and progressive work**. The four elements to integrate into a training program and then adapt to each horse are: **frequency, regularity, intensity, and volume**.



On average, from 15 years old, a horse is considered "aged" from a physiological point of view: its recovery capacities deteriorate, its muscle mass and its elasticity are more difficult to maintain, its dietary needs change, signs of osteoarthritis may begin to appear... It is advisable to limit trot work, prioritize gallop and of course, walk; but also, to choose its terrains: taking certain "greasy" paths in winter tires the tendons, while walking on the road will be effortless.

#### Remember to:

- ♦ Plan individualized training for each horse
- ♦ Define consistent objectives for a given period
- ♦ Prioritize quality of work over quantity
- ♦ Alternate effort and recovery phases during work
- ♦ Limit "unnecessary" or "harmful" situations
- ♦ Vary exercises, terrains, types of outings
- ♦ Ensure quality rest time

# Preparation of your trek

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## 1) Horse equipment

Appropriate and well-adjusted horse equipment greatly contributes to its well-being and must meet various criteria to avoid causing injuries. Harnessing should never be used for punitive purposes. The rider must ensure that their equipment is secure, functional, clean, and well-maintained, and check it before each use, ensuring it causes no discomfort and is correctly adjusted. Excessive restrictions of the horse by its harness are to be avoided, which is why international equestrian institutions are implementing the standardization of measurements to better protect our equines against inappropriately used equipment, such as with the FEI TackApp.

Finally, it is important to remember that whips, spurs, training aids, and bits serve to refine communication signals with your horse. They must be used with care, never violently.



Loading your mount is also an important element in the success of your ride. It is estimated that the horse can carry an average of 15% of its weight depending on its physical condition. An overload can lead to discomfort or breathlessness, which can result in more or less permanent pathologies depending on the frequency and overload. Load includes all equipment (saddle, bag, etc.) and the rider's build. The choice of a saddle adapted to the horse and rider is essential to ensure the health and comfort of the mount, as well as for the rider.

## 2) Outdoors ride

### Recommended items for a hike, to carry in your saddlebags:

- ♦ rider and horse ID papers
- ♦ money
- ♦ map/plan
- ♦ topoguide/roadbook
- ♦ charged phone
- ♦ string
- ♦ knife
- ♦ whistle
- ♦ hoof pick
- ♦ first aid kit

Backpacks are to be avoided as they may bounce around and get caught in branches.



### Before going for a trek, it is recommended to:

#### Plan your ride:

- Check the itinerary and water points along the way
- Bring a water bottle and enough food for long rides
- Travel light, do not overload your mount
- Make sure someone knows your itinerary and stay reachable

#### Before getting on the horse:

- Check your mount's feet/shoeing
- Stretch yourself and stretch your horse's limbs
- Practice mounting (with and without a mounting block) and dismounting from both sides.
- Walk a few minutes to check your horse's physical condition and gradually relax.
- Check the weather and adequately cover rider and horse



### Good to know:

Example of essential items for the first aid kit:

- ♦ an electronic thermometer
- ♦ disposable gloves
- ♦ round-tipped scissors
- ♦ a disposable razor
- ♦ a splinter forceps / a tick remover
- ♦ an antiseptic like yellow Betadine
- ♦ an antiseptic and healing cream
- ♦ cortisone-free eye drops
- ♦ aspirin
- ♦ anti-venom
- ♦ sugar
- ♦ sterile gauze compresses
- ♦ cohesive bandages like Elastoplast
- ♦ bandages

### 3) Protecting yourself from insects

**Processionary caterpillars** are the enemies of outdoor enthusiasts, and for good reason, their hairs fly off very easily and cause sometimes painful urticating reactions. Pine processionary caterpillars are urticating from November to March, and oak processionary caterpillars from May to July. They are recognized by their **procession-like movement**.



Pine  
Processionary  
caterpillars



It is strongly **advised** not to handle them, sweep them, and to wear protective clothing in the forest. In case of exposure, it is strongly recommended not to rub your eyes, take a shower, and wash your clothes at over 60°C.

Oak  
processionary  
caterpillars



**Ticks** are a scourge for riders and their horses because they transmit **piroplasmosis** and **Lyme disease**.

It is imperative, for both humans and equines, to **carefully remove** attached ticks as **quickly** as possible, preferably with a **tick remover** so as not to leave the head in the skin.

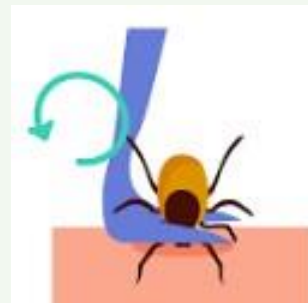
#### REMOVE A TICK

①



With a tick remover, grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible (within 24 hours).

②



Remove the tick by rotating the tick remover on itself.

③



Make sure not to leave the head in your skin.

④



Disinfect the bite area, your hands, and the tick remover, and monitor for signs of infection.

#### 4) Toxic plants

Additional **knowledge** about **toxic plants** can be very useful on a hike. If not identified and avoided, some plants can cause chronic **poisoning**, while others, much more harmful, can kill a horse with only a few grams.

Here is a **non-exhaustive list** of commonly encountered plants:

- **Deciduous trees:** Oak, Sycamore Maple and Box Elder Maple, Horse Chestnut, Black Locust.
- **Conifers or resinous trees:** Cypress, Fern, Yew, Thuja.

Fern



Yew



Thuja



- **Shrubs:** Boxwood, Laburnum, Broom and Spanish Broom, Cherry Laurel and Oleander, Ivy, Rhododendron, Privet.

Laburnum



Boxwood



Oleander

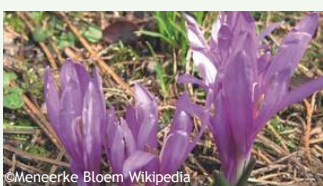


Ivy



- **Flowering plants:** Adonis, Buttercup, Giant Hogweed, Hemlock and Hemlock Water Dropwort, Autumn Crocus, Poppy, Datura, Foxglove, Spurge, Fennel, Sweet Vernal Grass or Buffalo Grass, Daffodil, Cocklebur, St. John's Wort, Lily of the Valley, Catsear, Marsh Horsetail, Ragwort.

Autumn Crocus



Poppy



St John's



Datura



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A photograph of a person riding a horse in a park. The rider is wearing a blue shirt, dark pants, and a brown helmet. They are riding a brown horse with a white blaze on its face and a white tail. The horse is standing in a shallow body of water, possibly a pond or a stream. The background is a lush green forest with trees and bushes. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

## Contact

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