

Horses: the vital signs

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Knowing how to check your horse's vital signs and what is normal for an adult horse at rest allows you to quickly identify illness and distress and, more importantly, do something about it.

For more information or advice on how to measure a horse's vital signs, or if you have any doubts about your horse's health, contact your local equine vet.



	Normal in adult horses at rest	How to measure
Temperature	37 – 38°C	The thermometer is inserted into the horse's rectum. Read the temperature after one minute.
Pulse/Heart Rate	Approximately 38 bpm (beats per minute)	The pulse can be found under the jaw, the underside of the dock etc. The easiest way is by locating a stethoscope on the near side of the chest, behind the elbow.
Respiration	8 – 15 breaths per minute	Observe the ribcage or place your hand in front of the nostril to feel exhalation.
Dehydration		The pinch test – pinch the skin on the horse's neck. The skin should flatten within one second of releasing the pinch of skin. The longer it takes to flatten is a measure of the dehydration level.
Capillary Refill Time (CRT)	1 – 2 seconds	Lift the horse's upper lip. Press your thumb firmly against the gums for two seconds. This will leave a white mark. Normal pink colour should return within 1 – 2 seconds.
Mucous Membranes	Linings of the eyelids, gums, inside the nostrils. The normal colour is a moist pink.	Abnormal: Very pale pink, bright red, grey, bluish, yellow.