

(The following is a Q&A published in *Equine Wellness*.)

Health Status

Dr. Christine King

Question:

What is there that we can see with the naked eye that gives us insight into our horse's health status?

Answer:

Well, there are a number of specific indicators (see below), but fundamentally it's simply a sense one gets about the health and well-being of the horse. Wellness is more than the absence of disease. It's a vitality of body, mind, and spirit; a vibrancy that is difficult to put into words, but unmistakable when you see it.

To be in good health is also to have a resilience to illness and injury; a robust constitution which resists disease and rapidly restores health and function if illness or injury does happen to overwhelm the body's resources.

As for specific physical or behavioral indicators of health, here are several:

- comfortable stance and normal posture
- body condition score between 4 and 6, on a scale from 1 (emaciated) to 9 (obese)
- bright, clear eyes
- alert ears
- interest in what is going on around her (factoring in her personality, whether shy, bold, or somewhere in between)
- absence of abnormal discharges from eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, anus, genitalia, or udder (if a mare)
- clean breath (unless fed garlic or some other aromatic substance)
- clean skin
- hair coat that is smooth and shiny (or at least soft), and an appropriate length for the climate and season
- effortless breathing, and breathing that is soft and slow (unless recently exercised)
- ease of movement
- good appetite

No doubt I've forgotten some items that should be listed there, but you get the general idea. It's pretty easy to tell a healthy, happy horse from an unhealthy or unhappy one, just as it is with humans. And when in doubt, trust your intuition.

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