

# Cooling out Overheated Horses

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## Cooling Overheated Horses

What is a hot environment for a horse? More than 80 degrees Fahrenheit . . .

What is the temperature of a horse that is too hot? Above 104 degrees Fahrenheit . . .

### There are some basic things you can do to make sure that your horse does not overheat after exercise:

1. Your horse should be fit for the exercise asked of him.
2. If your horse is fit and if you have been exercising him on a regular basis as spring progresses into summer and as the temperatures have gradually risen, then you probably have acclimated him for the heat and for the environment in which he will be working.
3. If you are going to an area that is hotter than where you live (not a problem for us in Texas), consider arriving early enough to train for a bit in the new place to acclimate the horse.
4. Remember that a horse that has just shipped for a long distance may be dehydrated and may have lost electrolytes during the trip--and therefore may suffer more heat stress. Make sure you supplement with electrolytes both before and after the trip, and make sure that he has a salt block.
5. You should DEFINITELY know what your horse's normal temperature is, before and after regular exercise!

### What do you need to cool out a really hot horse? (as in one coming off Cross Country at a July schooling show)

Large buckets to hold 10-12 gallons of water and a large amount of ice

Supply of more water close by, such as a hose or tank

Small buckets (1-2 gallons) so the horse can drink

An assistant to hold the horse and one person to sponge and scrape each side of the horse

A shady spot to carry out the cooling

If your horse is truly overheated, put him in the shade, give him a bath, sponge him down, scrape off the excess water, walk him, sponge him again, scrape, walk, sponge, scrape, walk, sponge, scrape, etc. The walking promotes blood flow to the skin and cooling by convection, while the movement of air aids cooling by evaporation. Do this until he is cool and his temperature is 101 degrees or less.

Do NOT place bags of ice against his skin since this reduces cooling by stopping skin blood flow to the area under the pack.

### Signs that a horse is in heat distress:

1. The horse seems tired or unwilling to go on.
2. His heart rate will be high, more than 60 beats per minute, or even as high as 80 if he is really in distress.
3. He will be blowing hard, more than 50 breaths per minute.
4. His body will be covered by a road map of bulging veins.
5. His gums will be a darker pink than normal, or even maroon if he is really having problems.
6. He will be standing without showing any interest in grazing or in what is going on around him.
7. His heart rate should always be higher than his respiratory rate. If his respiratory rate is higher than his heart rate, he is "inverted," and this signals a real problem!

If you see any of these signs of heat distress, STOP exercising your horse and begin cooling him immediately. If your horse does not cool out completely in one hour, call a veterinarian.