

## The veterinarian's role in equine retirement

A horse's health and soundness dictate retirement more so than age, so as a veterinarian your advice in this area is critical. Assessing a horse's physical and mental status isn't always easy for horse owners, because they see the horse daily and tend to miss changes that occur slowly over time. Older horses have bad days and good days. It is easy for an owner to overreact on the bad days. Discuss with your client how trends in their horse's health will tell them more about a horse's status than



one bad day. Assure your client that while test results can help in the decision-making process, the most important feedback comes directly from the horse. Whenever possible, show empathy for what your client is facing. Retirement is a period of continual adjustment for both the owner and the horse.

### Review with your client the signs that a horse is ready to slow down:

- Attitude changes (depressed, sour, anxious)
- Dry coat or a change in shedding patterns
- Digestive changes: dry or wet manure, recurring mild colic episodes, change in appetite
- Increased number of "off days"
- Less stamina during work or more soreness after exercise sessions
- Loss of athletic ability and flexibility
- Mild, intermittent lameness or shortening of stride
- Poor behavior when ridden: bucking, rearing, kicking out, head tossing, resistant
- Stiffness and soreness that remain even after being warmed up
- Stumbling on smooth footing
- Swayback or other conformation changes
- Swaying or moving as you mount (a sign of weakness or balance problems)

- Shortness of breath, chronic cough or noisy breathing
- Vision impairments (more easily spooked, does not adjust well to changes in light intensity)
- Unwillingness to do certain activities he used to be comfortable with
- Weight loss or loss of muscle mass

### Helping the horse adjust to retirement

An immediate cessation of activity is undesirable for most horses unless an acute lameness or illness is present. Many older horses are miserable going from an active lifestyle to standing by the pasture gate all day. Explain to your client that inactivity can exacerbate some problems, such as arthritis or metabolic disease. Older horses left turned out in a pasture to fend for themselves rarely do well.

Depending on a horse's health status, his retirement may consist of nothing more than a shorter show schedule or less-strenuous trail rides. Many older horses have "been around" and make wonderful mounts for beginner riders who demand less from their mounts. Dropping down a few competitive levels may be just what the veterinarian ordered. The key is to help your client monitor the new retiree carefully; don't let them underestimate how much a horse may miss his old life and old friends.

### Lots of TLC

Stress to your client that it is imperative for them to interact with their horse daily, even when they aren't riding them as often. A regular grooming session is the perfect time to check a horse over and evaluate his condition and attitude. Recommend they make feed and forage changes slowly. Don't abruptly take older horses off supplements or medications they have been getting for a long period of time. When problems arise, have the client call you immediately; don't just attribute the issue to "old age" and leave it to get worse. Discuss the need to continue routine veterinary, farrier and dental care.

## Nutritional Support for Seniors

**Elevate® Concentrate:** At 5,000 IU of natural vitamin E per serving, Elevate Concentrate easily supports horses with high vitamin E requirements. A powerful antioxidant, vitamin E maintains healthy muscle, nerve and immune functions by supporting lower levels of oxidative stress. Indicated in horses that do not, or cannot, graze on significant amounts of green grass and those challenged by neurological disease or suffering from muscular myopathies.

**JointWise™:** 1 ounce per day, added to the feed, provides a horse's joints with the nutrients needed to support healthy synovial fluid and resilient cartilage. The complete formula of JointWise helps maintain fluid motion and reduces inflammation in horses suffering from arthritis, making them more comfortable.

**ProbioticWise™:** Providing 1 to 4 ounces, depending on condition, supports the restoration of normal GI tract function in horses challenged by diarrhea. ProbioticWise enhances the complete digestion of starch and sugar in the foregut, decreasing the possibility of hindgut upset and pH imbalances (acidosis) that can lead to colic and laminitis in at-risk horses. It also supplies nutrients to the gastrointestinal tissues that support the healing of stomach and colonic ulceration.

**WeightGainWise™:** Add as little as ½ pound per day (8 oz) to the daily ration. WeightGainWise contains a concentrated blend of easy-to-digest, calorie-dense fats, plus prebiotics and probiotics that support optimal digestibility and stimulate a healthy appetite. WeightGainWise is an excellent source of energy for hard keepers or horses with dental issues.



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