



Care of the Older Horse

Information from the University of Illinois Veterinary Hospital

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By Scott Austin, DVM, MS, Diplomate ACVIM

The past several decades have seen an increase in the proportion of older horses. It is now estimated that horses greater than 16 years of age make up 16 percent of the horse population.

The aging of the horse population can be credited to improved nutrition, preventative care, and health management. Additionally, owners have adjusted their expectations of their older equine partners, thus allowing the horses to continue contributing their experience in the years after peak athletic performance is no longer possible.

Aging is a gradual, irreversible process that affects all body systems. It is estimated that at least 70 percent of horses greater than 16 years of age have a medical problem that requires veterinary attention to maintain health or comfort.

Regular dental care, body condition evaluation, and physical examination are important components of ensuring a healthy, comfortable old-age for your horse.

Call the University of Illinois Equine Primary Care service to enroll your older horse in a Wellness Program.

Common problems seen in the older horse include:

- Declining immune function
- Declining vision
- Poor thermoregulation
- Musculoskeletal problems
 - Sagging of topline and pendulous abdomen
 - Osteoarthritis
 - Suspensory ligament degeneration
 - Laminitis
- Dental problems
 - Missing or broken teeth
 - Malocclusion
- Alterations in body condition
 - Weight loss due to declining feed efficiency, bad teeth, loss of appetite, or concurrent disease
 - Weight gain due to decreased activity or Equine Metabolic Syndrome
- Altered internal organ function
 - Kidney disease
 - Liver disease
 - Cushing's Disease (Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction)
 - Equine Metabolic Syndrome

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Dr. Scott Austin makes farm calls

Dr. Scott Austin, a board-certified equine internal medicine specialist, says:

"My role is to maintain the health and welfare of my patients with regular wellness visits as well as to diagnose and manage illnesses and injuries and provide on-farm emergency care, when appropriate."

Call today for an appointment with Dr. Austin: **217-333-7232**

