

We all know how much ponies and horses love their grass, but if you've ever had a pony who can't stop eating - even under saddle - HW's Pony Princess Michelle O'Neill has some tips for overcoming your horse's hungry habits! This issue, Michelle also helps HW readers with some common training 'tantrums', as well as sensible and safe paddock etiquette.

## jumpwithconfidence

Dear Michelle,

*My name is Victoria and I have a 13.3hh pony called Pedro, who seems to have the memory of a goldfish when it comes to jumping. One day we are making so much progress with the height of our jumping and the next day we have to start all over again at a tiny cross pole and smaller! He stops at it and shies and won't go anywhere near it but I don't understand why! This gets really annoying and I don't know how to fix it! It's like he forgets what he learnt the other day overnight, but I know that he hasn't forgotten! This can sometimes affect my learning and my confidence with riding and I don't know how to fix it!*

**Please help!**

**Victoria**

Hi Victoria

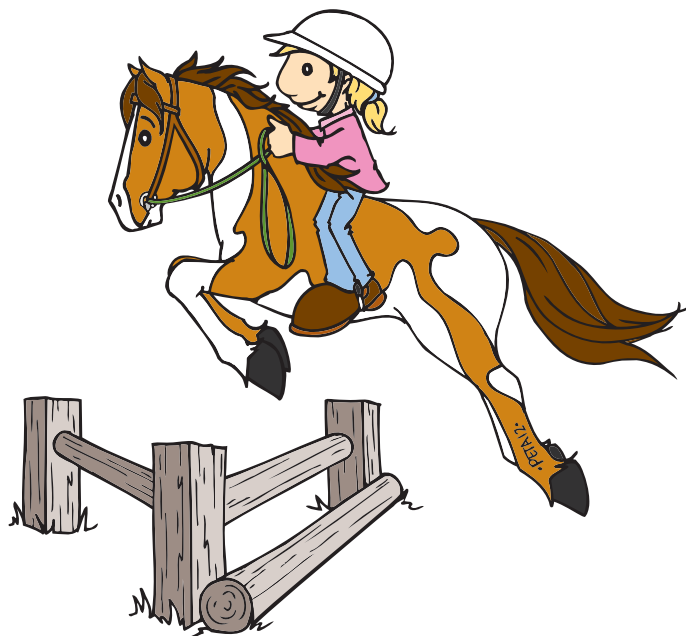
It can be very frustrating when we are training horses and we take one step forward and two steps backwards! But often the causes of our problems are not very hard to find!

As with any behavioural issue, the first thing you should check for is any signs of pain. Perhaps Pedro has something wrong (eg an injury or a poor fitting saddle) and he is learning to associate jumping with pain and that is why he does not want to jump. It would be a good idea to get a qualified professional to have a look at Pedro and make sure that he is feeling well and able to jump.

You don't say how old Pedro is. If he is very young or very old this will affect his ability to learn. Just like humans, horses have different learning abilities at different ages.

The other thing you must make sure is that it is not you who is making Pedro unhappy to jump! Sometimes, even though we don't realise it, we are doing something that makes an activity uncomfortable for a horse. I had a very good jumper once, but I also had a bad habit of not giving with my hands when I went over a jump. This made my horse start to refuse as every time he jumped I pulled on the reins. Once I learnt to give with my hands, he went back to being a great jumper again!

**I am sure with some good help and a little time you will be back jumping with confidence again!**



## topofthepeckingorder

Dear Michelle,

*I ride my friend's horse and his name is Oakey. He appears to be at the top of the pecking order. Every time we go for a ride in the paddock all the other horses in the herd come over! How can I stop all the horses coming over to us??*

**Annika**

Hello Annika!

What a great friend you have to let you ride her horse! That is a wonderful way to get to ride and to learn more about horses.

But whilst it is wonderful that you have Oakey to ride, it is not ideal that you are riding out in the paddock with loose horses. What do you think



Photo by Andrew Hennell

michelle o'neill

would happen if you were riding in the paddock and all the other horses took of bucking and jumping? Chances are, no matter how well trained Oakey is, he would want to do the same. Or a horse may decide to kick Oakey, only to discover that your leg was in the way instead!

A safe and dedicated riding area – whether it is a flat piece of ground or a trail – really helps you to enjoy your horse riding, without having to worry about being hurt or scared by loose horses. So the first step is to get rid of those equine distractions from your riding routine!

You really should either find another paddock to ride in, with no horses in it, or move the other horses away from where you are riding. You could do this by building another small enclosure or yard for the horses to be put, you could put the horses into another paddock – but you'll need to work with your friend to find the best solution, as this is her horse.

**I hope you can keep riding Oakey and learning, but remember to always be safe!**

## getoffthegrass

Dear Michelle,

*Any tips on getting my (very food motivated) pony to stop eating grass when I'm trying to ride? She's ok when I ride her normally with the bit, but when I ride in my bitless bridle it's impossible to pull her up. I've tried the Parelli method but she'll even ignore me completely if she wants a snack. She stops to eat when I'm trying to lead her too, although she usually has impeccable ground manners.*

Emi

Hi Emi!

Ponies sure do love food! Even some of my big quarter horses think that food is more important than anything in their life!

I have seen a lot of people use "grass reins" with ponies who want to eat all the time.

But from what you've described, you sound like you are beyond that stage now and you are ready and capable to deal with the problem yourself!

My preferred method to stop a pony from eating is to keep their feet busy. By this I mean that if your pony wants to eat, you need to keep him moving so that he doesn't have the chance to get his head down. Now this works best if you can get him moving BEFORE he gets his head down. The instant you feel him start to slow down and drop his head you need to get working to make sure he keeps moving.

Of course this takes a little time and practice, so to make it easier, what you may need to do is disengage his hindquarters to help you. By this I mean to ask your pony to give his nose to you as you would for a one rein stop (we have covered this in previous issues of HW so go back and read through the last few issues too) but then use your inside leg to keep his hind feet moving around.

This will not only help you to keep his feet moving, but will make sure you do not end up in a tug-of-war with your pony (and if you pull with two reins, chances are the first thing you pony will do is pull back).

**Good luck Emi!**



**MITAVITE GIVEAWAY!** Thanks to the team at Mitavite, every HW reader who has their letter featured in HW's Help Line column will receive a gift voucher for a bag of **Mitavite Xtra-Cool horse feed**; it doesn't get any cooler than this! Check out [www.mitavite.com.au](http://www.mitavite.com.au) to find your nearest Mitavite stockist! You can e-mail your horsey questions to Michelle at [mail@horseywyse.com.au](mailto:mail@horseywyse.com.au) or post your letters to 'Ask Michelle' c/o HorseWyse Magazine, PO Box 260, Pambula, NSW 2549, Australia. And remember, no problem (or pony) is too small to Ask Michelle!



training • sales • lessons • stud

## JOIN US ON FACEBOOK



To learn more about **Cherry Tree Equine** visit our website or join us on **Facebook** to find out all about the latest events, horses for sale and see some fabulous horsey photos!

[www.cherrytreeequine.com.au](http://www.cherrytreeequine.com.au)



CHERRY TREE EQUINE