

Horse ownership can help teach us all about responsibility and commitment...but keeping a horse can also be a very expensive hobby! This issue, HW's Pony Princess Michelle O'Neill answers HW reader's questions on saving \$\$\$ to buy or lease a pony and how to better understand and manage some common dietary problems in horses.

save every cent

Dear Michelle,

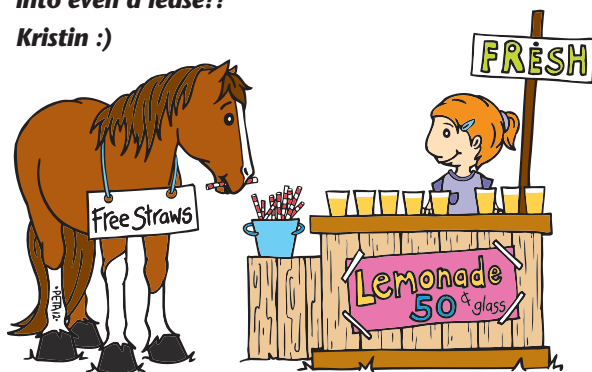
Help I'm horse-less!!

I'm saving every dollar or cent I get for tack, feed, spare money (for vet bills etc) and of course the horse itself! I haven't saved much but I'm thinking of aiming for a lease first - but even that will take some time to convince my parents!

I'm certain I am ready for a lease - it can help me know what it's like once all those cents add up to that horse :D

Any tips on convincing non horsey parents into even a lease??

Kristin :)



Hi Kristin

How great to hear you are so keen to join us in the world of horse ownership!

I was very much like you; it took me a long time to prove to my parents how dedicated I was to horses before they would get me one. And we did lease my first horse.

Partially because of this, HorseWyse Magazine and Cherry Tree Equine have put together a DVD to answer questions like yours! And you will be happy to know there is a section in the DVD on leasing! Leasing can be a great way to get your first horse or pony, but it can also be fraught with danger, so be careful!

Leasing or owning a horse is a very expensive exercise, as I am sure many of your friends can tell you. Before you leap into the world of horse ownership, I really suggest you have the full support of your parents, as at some stage they will need to spend money on your new best friend, whether you own or lease him or her.

In the meantime, why not volunteer your time at horse riding establishments in your area? This will help you to prove to your parents how keen you really are and you will also gain valuable experience around horses. Perhaps offer to help an experienced horse person at their next competition or event?

Good luck with your goal of owning a horse!

poor founded pony

Dear Michelle,

My name is Tyla and I am five years old (my Gran is helping me write to you). My parents recently gave me a pony of my own. His name is Prince and I love him heaps. Unfortunately, before we got him he had foundered quite severely. We have him locked up off green feed and I gently exercise him regularly. Dad regularly attends to his feet.

Can you suggest anything else we can do to keep him fit and healthy?

Tyla Armeni

Thank you Tyla (and Gran) for your lovely letter!

You sound like you are taking excellent care of Prince! You are certainly doing things correctly; keeping a foundered pony off green feed, exercising him gently and looking after his feet regularly are all very important and I encourage you to keep doing them.

It is also really important to pick Prince's feet out twice a day and keep him out of mud at all costs. When he gets build up in his feet, he will have lots of soul pressure, which can hurt him.

If you do let him out to graze, it is best to do it in the mornings; as in the afternoons is when plants have the highest levels of sugar, which are dangerous to a foundered pony.



I make sure MY young pony Comet doesn't founder by keeping him in a yard for a few hours each afternoon, when grass sugar levels are at their most dangerous.



Photo by Andrew Hennell

michelle o'neill

The only exception to this rule is if you have had a frost (and we get lots where I live!) as frost will make the grass dangerous like it is in the afternoons.

If you feed Prince hay, it is best to soak it for at least four hours before you feed it. It is believed that soaking the hay can help reduce the amount of sugar in the hay. Be sure to throw the water away as this is where the sugars will end up.

A product I have seen used a lot with great success is Founderguard. You can buy it from your vet or local feed shop. It helps to prevent ponies from foundering, but it must be fed as directed to work really well.

And of course, remember that Prince may still need some form of supplement to make sure he has a balanced diet, just like Lauren's horse.

I hope you and Prince have years of fun together!

abalanceddiet&onthebit

Dear Michelle,

My horse is a 14.2 Stockhorse x welsh and he is six. My problem is that when he is out in the paddock he will occasionally eat his manure. I am thinking that he is deprived of some nutrition but I don't know what.

Also, can you help me with some tips on how to get a horse on the bit? I have been trying with my horse and he puts his head down, but doesn't keep it there. Please Help Me!!

Lauren

Hi Lauren

To help answer your question relating to your horse eating his manure, I went straight to my friends at Mitavite for advice.

Often manure eating is caused by low fibre levels in a horse's diet; basically not enough grass, chaff and hay. So that is our first suggestion; add some extra roughage to his diet each day as all horses need to eat a minimum of 1-1.5% of their bodyweight in roughage per day.

Of course it is always important to make sure your horse is getting a "balanced diet", so if you think your horse is missing out on nutrients you might want to try a feed like Promita with the extra roughage to help balance things up. Promita is what we call a nutrient balancer; which means it has all the essential nutrients and minerals a horse needs in a small dose feed.

Your problem with keeping your horse's head down is one everybody faces at some stage. The important thing to remember is to never force your horse to carry his head in an unnatural position. Some horses simply are not designed to carry their head down!

When I teach my horses to lower their heads I do it as softly as possible; I will gently close my fingers and ask them to drop their poll. The instant they make the slightest effort, I will reward them by letting my reins go really soft.

There is no quick fix for this problem I'm afraid! You just have to practice lots, first standing still, then at each of your paces. And remember, when you do it when you are moving, make sure your horse moves forward and doesn't lose impulsion!

Keep practicing!



Here, I am riding Te with no hard pressure on the reins at all; just a light contact. But by giving and releasing over time, and being consistent and patient in my training, I have taught Te to carry his head in a soft and balanced way. *Photos by Carolyn Wyllie.*



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