

# EMA

Equine Massage Academy Ltd

*Therapy Education Research*

## **Recognising Subtle Health Changes in Horses Most Owners Dismiss (But Shouldn't)**



When we think of illness in horses, we tend to look for obvious signs—colic, high temperature, refusal to eat, or clear distress.

But in reality, many health issues start with quiet, inconsistent changes that are easy to brush off.

The problem?

These “minor” signs are often the early warning system—and they’re frequently missed.

## The Missing Piece

### 1. “Just a Quiet Day”

Some days your horse feels a little flat... less energy, less sparkle.

You might notice:

- Slower to respond
- Less enthusiasm to move or work
- More time standing quietly

It’s easy to put this down to mood—but repeated lethargy can indicate **underlying health or immune stress**.

### 2. Occasional Runny Nose

A small amount of nasal discharge now and again is often dismissed.

But ask yourself:

- Is it recurring?
- Does it appear after travel or events or a little more work than usual?
- Is it clear, cloudy, or thicker than usual?

This can be an early sign of **respiratory irritation or infection**—especially in horses mixing with others not from the same yard.

### 3. Loose Droppings (That “Come and Go”)

Not quite diarrhoea... but not normal either.

- Slightly loose
- Inconsistent
- Changes depending on stress, travel, or workload

This can indicate:

- Digestive imbalance
- Stress response
- Early gut disruption

### 4. Increased Exposure to Other Horses

If your horse:

- Competes regularly

- Travels frequently
- Is stabled at busy yards with lots of coming and going

They are constantly exposed to **new environments and unknown pathogens**.

Even if they seem fine, their immune system may be working harder than you realise.

### **5. Slower Recovery Than Usual**

After work, travel, or competition:

- Taking longer to return to normal
- Slightly elevated breathing for longer
- Less appetite post-event

These subtle changes can signal **fatigue, stress, or underlying strain on the body**.

### **6. Small Changes in Appetite or Drinking**

Nothing dramatic—but just *not quite normal*.

- Leaving a little feed
- Drinking slightly more or less
- Being fussier than usual

These are often overlooked—but can be early indicators of **internal imbalance or discomfort**.

### **Why These Signs Matter?**

Individually, these signs don't seem like much.

But together? They paint a picture.

They are often the **very first indicators** that something isn't quite right—*before* your horse becomes clinically unwell and you need Veterinary support.

### **The Problem Most Owners Face**

The real challenge isn't noticing these signs...

It's knowing:

- *Are they normal?*
- *Should I be concerned?*
- *What should I check next?*

Without that knowledge, it's easy to either:

- Worry unnecessarily
- or**
- Miss something important

## The Key Skill Every Horse Owner Should Have!

This is where understanding your horse's **vital signs** becomes essential.

Because when something feels “off,” vital signs give you **clear, objective answers**.

- Is their temperature elevated?
- Is their heart rate normal?
- Is their respiration telling you something more?

Instead of guessing... you *know*!

## Want to Feel Confident, Not Uncertain?

Inside our **Equine Emergency First Aid course**, we teach you exactly how to:

- Take and interpret vital signs correctly
- Recognise early signs of illness
- Monitor your horse with confidence
- Know when it's safe to wait—and when to call the vet

Because those small, inconsistent changes?  
They're often the moments that matter most.

## Want to Go Further?

Our practical, no-work courses are designed to give you real understanding—not just theory. You can be more proactive in the healthcare of your horse and potentially save the money and downtime if your horse falls unwell.

### First choice courses:

- **Equine Emergency First Aid** [LINK](#)
- **Taking Vital Signs (this is a very basic course than the above)** [LINK](#)

## Follow-Up Learning Recommendations

If your horse is showing signs of being under par, or if you want to avoid ill health - it's important to consider any underlying cause. While issues may relate to training, performance, or injury management, which is a category we offer courses in that might be applicable to you and horse, we recommend starting with our Healthcare and Wellness category.

These courses are designed to help you better understand your horse's day-to-day health and identify small changes that can make a significant difference. You may be surprised at how much can be improved through informed management, often helping to prevent conditions that can become limiting or costly to treat.

We recommend the following courses:

- **Natural Horse Health for Wellness: Harnessing the Power of Plants** (this course is for those who want to keep their horses in a more natural way [LINK](#))

- Impact of Nutrition on Equine Wellness, Performance and Recovery (you will learn everything about nutrition here and supplements too that can be causing your horse to be toxic) [LINK](#)
- Optimising Gut Health and Colic Prevention (so many conditions are from the gut) [LINK](#)
- Optimum Management for Travelling Horses – Certificate of Competency (many horses have low lying health issues due to travelling) [LINK](#)
- Paddock Management for Equestrian Use (good health starts from the ground up) [LINK](#)

**Learn the subtle health cues your horse is showing you .....**

Our courses are approved by:

