

BREATHING EASY

Respiratory problems can be a serious issue in horses.
Acupressure may provide some welcome relief.

BY AMY SNOW AND NANCY ZIDONIS



You can take the horse out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the horse." Domesticating and stabling horses has radically changed their natural environment and can lead to some serious health issues. Respiratory difficulties are reported to be the leading health problem in domesticated horses.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE

Indicators of respiratory problems range from being very subtle to extremely severe. At the first hint of any pulmonary issue, start by immediately consulting your holistic veterinarian for recommendations.

In both Eastern and Western healthcare, the breath is the key to health. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the lungs are considered the "Master of the Pulse."

Coughing indicates a respiratory irritation that may be caused by an environmental allergen such as dust, a mild cold, or a viral contagion that is inflaming the lungs. Other indicators of pulmonary illness can include:

- yellow or thick nasal discharge (a clear fluid nasal discharge is most likely normal)
- shortness of breath
- low energy level
- labored breathing
- wheezing, raspy or congested breathing
- heaving chest
- flared nostrils
- swollen lymph nodes under the jaw
- elevated body temperature.

RESPIRATORY HEALTH AND OVERALL WELLNESS

Horse guardians need to be constantly conscious of how

well their horses are breathing, since any airway issue affects the animal's health. When the lungs are undermined at all, the horse's immune system can become generally compromised.

An active, athletic horse needs a lot of oxygen. For example, a horse in training or competition requires the following air capacity to support top performance:

While at rest: 5 liters of air per breath; 12 breaths per minute; 60 liters of air per minute

While at work: 12 - 15 liters of air per breath; 150 breaths per minute; 1,800 liters of air per minute

When a foal takes his very first breath, his life-promoting energy or Chi becomes completely dependent on his continuing ability to breathe.

HOW EQUINE ANATOMY HELPS

There are many ways you can help prevent respiratory problems. Luckily, the horse's anatomy provides the first line of defense.

- His nostrils, along with long nasal passages and trachea, serve to protect the bronchioles and alveolar sacs of the lungs.
- The secretion of mucus and other beneficial substances along the air passages provides a liquid barrier that protects the tissues.
- The lining of the airways has a multitude of microscopic projections that sweep dust particulates and other irritants into the back of the throat so they are not inhaled.

IMMUNITY AND TCM

Maintaining a strong immune system combined with stable/barn cleanliness and other methods of equine care are the next best defenses against pulmonary diseases. Many horse guardians are turning to TCM, a powerful resource for supporting the horse's immune system. Acupressure, which is based on TCM, offers guardians

MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS



CLEAN AIR

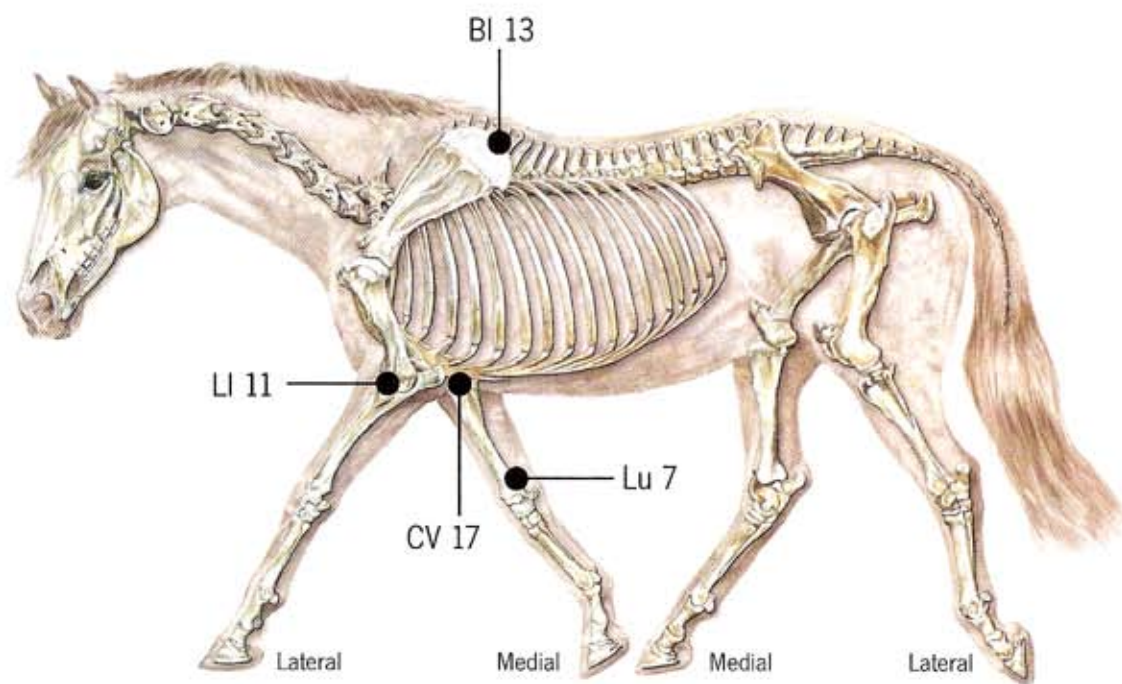
- Offer ample turnout
- Groom outside
- Use dust-free bedding
- Exercise or train in a dust-free environment
- Provide good ventilation in any enclosure
- Muck stable when horse is not present
- Check for mold, fungi, ammonia, or other toxins

FEED

- Feed at ground level (grazing posture)
- Store feed in a dry, protected enclosure
- Shake out hay, use dust-free hay or dust-free alternative feed
- Soak hay (though remember that soaking removes nutrients)
- Check feed for mold, fungi, and toxins

EXPOSURE

- Isolate when horse exhibits signs of respiratory issues
- Maintain separate feeding, grooming, and cleaning equipment
- Monitor horse's temperature and other signs
- Reduce horse's activity
- Observe other horses in the facility



a specific method of helping their horses breathe and avoid airway disease.

Because its focus is on prevention, TCM is a true health management system. The underlying concept is that when Chi is flowing throughout the horse's body in a harmonious and balanced fashion, his immune system is strong and able to fend off allergens, viruses or any other pathogens that could lead to illness. So the goal is to build and maintain a healthy immune system.

Specific acupressure points, also called acupoints, are known to support the lungs and immune system. These points are invisible pools of Chi located along energetic pathways known as "meridians." When we apply finger pressure to an acupoint, we are stimulating the movement of Chi and blood along the meridians. This enhances and balances the flow of life-promoting energy and nourishment throughout the horse's body.

ACUPRESSURE FOR LUNG SUPPORT

An acupressure session can do a lot to maintain healthy lungs. There are acupoints that address specific lung issues, but a TCM practitioner would need to assess the individual horse in order to select the appropriate acupoints that would help resolve the particular issue.

When horses are allowed to graze with their heads lowered to the ground, the airways are naturally cleared.

The following acupoints are ideal for a general acupressure session to support lung health and build the immune system.

Lung 7 (Lu 7), Broken Sequence: Located just in front of the cephalic vein (the large vein that extends down the inside of the front leg) at the level of

the lower border of the chestnut. Lu 7 strengthens lung Chi and stimulates the circulation of immune system or protective Chi.

Bladder 13 (Bl 13), Lung Transporting/Shu Point: Found on the back edge of the scapula just back from the

withers and about 3" away or down (lateral) from the dorsal (top) midline. This acupoint offers a direct connection to the lung organ system. It is used commonly for respiratory conditions.

Conception Vessel 17 (CV17), Central Altar or Sea of Tranquility: Located on the ventral (underside) midline at the level of the caudal (back) edge of the horse's elbow. It's a powerful acupoint that regulates and supports Lung Chi.

Large Intestine 11, (LI 11), Crooked Pond: On the lateral or outside crease of the elbow on the forelimb. This point is easily found by lifting and flexing the elbow and sliding your thumb from the top of the elbow crease toward the lower end. Stop when you feel a deep indent; you are on LI 11. This acupoint is commonly used for strengthening the immune system and enhancing deficiency issues.

We may have taken our horses out of the country, but health support tools such as acupressure, holistic veterinary care, good stable/barn hygiene and other equine management techniques will help maintain his immunity and wellness. If a horse receives the benefits of an acupressure session every fifth or sixth day, spends most of his time turned out or working in a natural environment, and is allowed to graze on grasses or dust-free grass hay, then he will fulfill the promise of a strong and active life! 🐾

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