



# What's Up Doc?

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## Water is Life!



Horses require water for survival. Water keeps bodily functions working properly such as internal temperature, nutrient absorption, removing wastes and body weight. They not only get their water from the stock tank but also from the food they consume.

Horses need to have access to unfrozen water throughout the winter. Snow IS NOT enough to live on and can be detrimental. Eating snow uses a lot of energy and body heat. The average horse will consume 5-10 gallons of water daily. Horses on full work load for the winter can consume upwards of 15 gallons a day. Keep in mind every horse's specific needs may be different.



It is important to track a horse's water intake in the winter to be sure they are still drinking. Horses commonly decrease the amount of water they consume during the cold months and this can lead to serious issues such as impaction colic. Poor dental health can also affect the consumption of water. A young horse with a sensitive mouth or a horse with a bad tooth will likely be quite sensitive to ice cold water.

"Providing a plain bucket of water as well as a bucket with balanced electrolytes, especially for horses that drastically reduce their water intake in winter, may help keep colic at bay" says Dr. Morris. It can be difficult to maintain water at a comfortable drinking temperature for horses, especially in areas without electricity like an old barn or on distant pastures. Taking the chill off the water with a tank heater typically will increase the amount of water a horse is willing to drink.



Options for water heaters near an electricity source include electric heated buckets, floating/sinking de-icers and automatic waterers. Propane de-icers can be used for pasture tanks. Make sure heaters and extension cords are in good working order before use with horses to prevent electric shock. Keeping stock tanks from freezing solid involves a lot of insulation. Burying the tank underground by a few inches will use geothermal heat to insulate the tank.





It is important to know the signs of dehydration in horses. Some simple observations that can be made at home include the skin pinch test, appearance of gums, and their capillary refill time, and appearance of eyes. To perform the skin pinch test, pinch the skin on the neck/shoulder area. The raised skin should return to laying normally within 1-2 seconds. A slower return rate could be cause for concern. Gums should appear pink and moist. Dry and reddened gums could indicate dehydration. Capillary refill time is the time it takes for blood to refill after pressing your thumb on a horse's gums. After releasing pressure, the gums should turn pink within 1-2 seconds. Eyes should appear bright and moist. None of these symptoms by themselves necessarily means dehydration, but they should be noted and followed up on.

Providing plenty of fresh, clean, safe water in the winter is key to helping keep you horse comfortable and healthy. Horses require extra vigilance on their water consumption, especially in winter. Water availability can be life or death for horses. If there are any concerns regarding your horse and dehydration call Countryside Large Animal Vet at 970-351-7045.

