

How to Nurse a Neglected Horse Back to Full Health

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Surprising as it seems, some people have no respect for one of man's best friends.

You have no idea, how many horses still get treated like so much rubbish, especially when their useful life comes to an end.

But what do you do with an old horse? Sometimes I think It would be better, and more dignified, to get out the gun, and finish it off, rather than to abandon it to its own devices, after a lifetime of dedicated and faithful serving its human master.

It's as bad as throwing an employee on the streets, after 40 years of dedication to serving your business. Do I sound harsh? Yes I do, because even in the so-called enlightened age we live in, such treatment still continues.

So what happens if you come across such an animal, and manage to extricate her from the mess she is in?

Even if this has been going on for some time, horses are very resilient, and can lose up to 30 percent or more of their body weight and still survive, but horses in an abused, starved condition have very little muscle mass remaining and as a consequence will be in a very weak state.

They will need careful attention and lots and lots of TLC to restore trust, understanding and a sound nutritional program to get them back into some form of proper body condition.

The first thing to do is to start by providing the horse with good quality hay, water and a mineral/vitamin supplement, like Hoffmans Mineral in block or granular form.

Feed good-quality grass hay, which is less likely to cause digestive upset than alfalfa or clover hay.

Try to provide it in plenty-1.5 to two percent of the horse's body weight daily (12-16 pounds for an 800-pound horse), but hold the grain for two weeks.

A lot of hassle but well worth it in the end result. Where the horse is an older animal probably 'dumped' into retirement, (20 years or thereabouts) with poor or missing teeth, the ability to chew long-stemmed hay may be pretty compromised.

Feed these older ones a feed developed specifically for geriatric horses, such as Triple Crown Senior and Triple Crown Chopped Grass Forage, gradually increasing the amount of feed to around one percent of body weight and chopped forage up to half-percent of body weight. Where the horse's tooth condition is quite poor, then you should try and turn the feed and forage into a mash to assist the poor animal to get stuck in to this food. Start the grain feeding process slowly.

Remember that the horse has probably not been fed grain for a long, long time, and its digestive system will need some time to adjust. Start this process by feeding less than 2 kilograms of grain twice a day. Gradually increase the amount of grain by adding one pound per day until feeding one half to one percent of the horse's body weight daily.

If you try and control the feed level carefully in this way with plenty of hay and plenty of grain, this will allow for the gradual weight gain you're after.

Bringing a starved horse to normal body condition will take three to six months, depending on the severity of weight loss.

Don't give up during this process – Believe me it will work in the end, and you and your horse will feel so much the better for it.

Be consistent and keep increasing the amount of hay and grain as the horse's weight increases, feeding one half to one percent of body weight in grain and 1.5 percent as good quality hay.

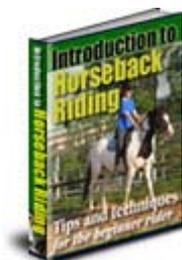
Once you can see that the horse has regained some strength and has become familiar with its surroundings, check with your veterinarian about health care. Your vet may advise you to only use a half-dose of de-wormer the first time you treat the horse for internal parasites.

A massive die-off of parasites in the horse triggered by a full dose of de-wormer could trigger a bout of colic. A dental check up is also in order, as this has likely not been done for a long time. Your veterinarian may also discover other health problems that need attention.

It's also important to contact your farrier about hoof care, as the horse's hooves have more than likely been neglected, as well.

When all is well, don't expect to have a very lively horse for a while.

By starting gentle daily exercise in your yard, you should build this up over a period, and slowly but surely, you will start to gain the trust of this old neglected horse, and will have created a friend for the rest of its natural life.



Roger Bourdon is the author of "Introduction to Horseback Riding" and owner of the site www.anyhorsebackriding.com. If you are interested in horse riding, then sign up for Roger's free mini course and news letters at www.anyhorsebackriding.com