

# Horse & Rider

# MONTHLY

DECEMBER 2022

*In this issue...*

TIPS FOR  
**OLDER HORSES  
IN WINTER**

7 WINTER  
**TRAIL-RIDING  
HAZARDS**

A BREAKDOWN  
OF **ALTERNATIVE  
THERAPIES**



Brought to you by



FEED GREATNESS®

[HorseandRider.com](http://HorseandRider.com)

PHOTO BY DIASANA PERKINS/STOCKADOBEE.COM



**Science + Love. Helping Horses Thrive.**

Our Purina PhD Nutritionists tackle problems using science. And our love of horses keeps us at it until we get it right. Even with our most established feeds, we keep innovating. Even when it takes years of research, we don't stop until it's right. We're dedicated to the scientific method, but it can't capture the feeling of seeing a horse reach their full potential. It takes science and love to help your horse live their best life.

Put our research to the test at [HorseInnovation.com](https://www.horseinnovation.com)



FEED GREATNESS®

# Horse Life



TRAIN / HEALTH

# 4 Mindset Keys to Achieve Your Goals

**ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 5, 2020**, Sebastian Petroll saw 18 months' worth of work with 3-year-old mare Dunit The Walla Way, owned by Ellen Lloyd Cummins, come to fruition. The National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) Professional and his gritty mare won the NRHA Futurity Level 3 and Level 2 open titles and pocketed nearly \$60,000 for their efforts.

Looking back on that night, Petroll said four key factors played a role in his pathway to success and steadied his mental game. Read on, and decide how you can apply his advice to sharpen your mental edge as you work toward your riding goals.

## MINDSET KEY #1: *Set a Big Goal, But Be Adaptable*

It all begins with putting yourself out there and mapping your path. Whether it's a major win like Petroll's or going on your first camping trip with your horse, the first steps are setting your intention and determining how to get there. More often than not, you might have to change your goal or the way you had planned to get there.

"Horses can change, new opportunities may come along or go away; being adaptable helps you refocus and stay nimble," the trainer advised. Make plans, but be ready to adjust.

## MINDSET KEY #2: *Embrace Mistakes*

"It's human nature to want everything to go well," Petroll sympathized. "But that's not how you or your horses get better."

While you prepare your horse at home, welcome his weaknesses instead of avoiding them.

"Your horse tells you where your problem areas are every single ride," Petroll said. "Dig deep when they present themselves. Examine them from all angles at home so you can solve them—or know how to handle them—if they present in the arena at a show or out riding with friends."

For example, instead of avoiding that your horse doesn't stand tied at the trailer at a trail head, work on it at home so you're confident he can handle the situation—or you can get him into a better headspace to manage it—when you're away from home. Or if your reiner tends to lean in a rundown, embrace the chance to address it at home instead of pretending it'll all be OK at the show—because it likely won't.

"I try not to shy away from problems," Petroll continued. "When it comes to the wire, those are the things that will fall apart. Bring them out more and fix them or find

★ Your mental sharpness comes into play every time you ride. Keep these four keys in mind the next time you saddle up.

a way to address them. Embracing these opportunities builds your confidence, as well as your horse's."

## MINDSET KEY #3: *Be Decisive*

The last year has brought a lot of uncertainty in our lives, but in times like these, it's even more important to make definite decisions.

"The weeks leading up to the NRHA Futurity were a rollercoaster ride that was rather stressful," Petroll shared. "The pressure and expectation are high every year going to NRHA's biggest event, but not knowing if the event was going to be canceled at the last minute wasn't easy to deal with.

"Once we got there I decided to prep and show as if everything was 'normal,' he continued.

That decision paid off for Petroll. "We have to make dozens of decisions every day when we work with our horses," he said. "We ask ourselves what we need more or less of,

if our horses are trying or understanding. To accomplish your goals, you must confidently make decisions and not second-guess yourself all the time. Most times it's better to correct a wrong decision than never making one."

## MINDSET KEY #4: *An Attitude of Gratitude*

After a major win or achieving a longstanding goal, a younger or less experienced rider might be eager to move right into the next show season or tackle the next goal. A more seasoned horseman chooses a different path.

"We set all these deadlines for ourselves, but through my years of training horses, I now try to think about it and enjoy it more," Petroll said. "I try to let moments really sink in and not take anything for granted. I still watch video clips from those runs at the 2020 NRHA Futurity—I slow down and actually enjoy what happened, what my horse and I accomplished."

Petroll asserts that this mindset allows him to reflect on his efforts without letting a major achievement go to his head or change his thinking.

"With more experience comes the realization that big achievements don't come along every day," he said. "You'll have hard times when the wins or big milestones won't keep coming. Having gratitude when they do helps build your confidence. When you say to yourself, 'I just did really good!' and enjoy that moment, you can look back on it during hard times when things seem like they're falling apart and know that you can put them back together." ★



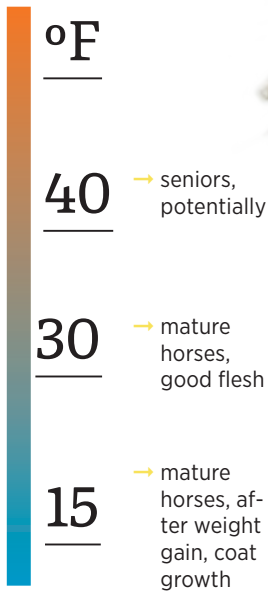
PHOTO: LINDSAY HUMPHREY, COURTESY OF NRHA

# Tips for older horses in winter

Your senior horse needs extra TLC in cold weather. Give him plenty of forage—such as hay—because it creates inner warmth as it’s metabolized. A good senior feed may be helpful, too, as a little extra weight can also help your oldster stay warm. Make sure he has adequate shelter, and if he’s wearing a blanket, check it often for rubs. Seniors often have weaker immune systems, so make sure yours is properly vaccinated, especially against flu. Exercise—such as gentle riding or hand walking—can boost health and help prevent or alleviate stiffness.



## Critical Temperatures



A little extra watchfulness will help keep your old guy healthy and happy throughout the winter.

PHOTO BY ALEXIA KHRUSCHEVA/GETTYIMAGES.COM

“Critical temperature” is the temp below which your horse must produce additional heat to maintain his normal body temperature. Seniors have a higher cut-off than mature horses do, so it’s even more important for them to have plenty of heat-generating feed when temperatures drop.

Source: Purina Animal Nutrition

## Key Checks



**grooming**  
Watch especially for topline changes, skin problems, small wounds, foot issues.



**weight loss**  
A weight tape is an easy way to check for incremental weight loss over the winter.



**water source**  
Water should be fresh, plentiful, and of a temperature your horse finds drinkable.



A person wearing a brown cowboy hat and a dark jacket is riding a brown horse through a snowy landscape. The scene is captured from behind the rider, showing the horse's tail and the rider's legs. The background features snow-covered trees and mountains under a warm, golden sunset sky. The text "WINTER TRAIL-RIDING HAZARDS" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

# WINTER TRAIL-RIDING HAZARDS

Cold, snowy days don't keep you off the trail.  
Put safety first with these expert tips  
on negotiating winter trail hazards.



Winter riding can be fun if you're prepared. When riding in snow, find and stick to trails and roadways where the snow isn't as deep. Keep your horse well collected, with his weight back over his hindquarters, and give him enough rein so that he can use his head.

PHOTO BY GABRIEL/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

**W**inter trail riding can be fun if you're prepared with these tips. Of course, you try to avoid the trail riding hazards that might get you and your horse into real trouble, such as blizzards and ice storms. But Mother Nature has a wicked sense of humor. A nice winter day can turn nasty in minutes. You might find yourself riding in snow far deeper than you'd anticipated or suddenly sliding downhill on an icy trail.

Here, we give you tips on how to negotiate seven winter riding hazards:

### HAZARD #1: Deep snow

**Why it's hazardous:** Your horse may panic in a deep snow bank and flounder about, possibly pulling a muscle, or straining tendons and ligaments. Deep snow can also cover underlying trail hazards, such as holes and sharp objects.

**What you should do:** Find and stick to trails and roadways where the snow isn't as deep. Keep your horse well collected, with his weight back over

his hindquarters. A collected horse usually has a "spare leg" to catch himself, because his weight is more evenly distributed in relationship to his center of gravity; he'll be more agile with less effort than if he carries his weight on his forehead. At the same time, give him enough rein so that he can use his head and neck for balance.

Keep in mind that moving through deep snow will tire your horse, especially if the snow is wet and heavy. (Fine, powdery, dry snow is much easier for him to step through.) Scale back your ride, especially if he isn't in top shape. Otherwise, he may become worn out and sore, and/or develop muscle cramps.

Avoid brushing against snow-covered trees and bushes. You can get chilled if a load of snow falls down your neck, and onto your bare hands and saddle seat. Your horse may also spook at the falling snow.

### HAZARD #2: Snowdrifts

**Why they're hazardous:** Blowing,

drifting snow can fill ditches and gullies, leaving a smooth landscape. You won't know your horse is walking into a hole or deep gully until the ground drops out from under him, and he's floundering or falling down.

**What you should do:** Stick to familiar trails; don't travel cross-country, where the terrain is rougher. Avoid riding through the drifted areas, if possible. You may not be able to gauge drift depth until your horse is up to his belly and struggling to wallow through.

### HAZARD #3: Frozen ground

**Why it's hazardous:** Frozen ground is second only to sheer ice in slickness. Even grass is slippery when frozen. Your horse's feet are designed to cut into the ground a little with each step, for traction. If he can't dig into the hard, frozen surface, his feet will slip at every step. And he may go down so quickly that you won't have time to pull your foot out of the stirrup and get out of harm's way.

**What you should do:** Take it slow. Travel at a walk, and avoid sudden turns

or stops. Try to stay on flat terrain. Especially try to avoid going downhill; horses usually have better traction going up than down.

Never go around the side of a hill; instead, ride straight up or straight down the hill. When you get to a more level area, you can continue in the direction you wish to go. When going downhill, a surefooted horse that's going straight can slip and slide all the way to the bottom and still keep his feet underneath himself. Even if he slides down on his haunches, he won't fall. However, if he's traveling at an angle to the hill, his feet may slip out from under him, causing a bad fall.

If your horse is reasonably surefooted, don't dismount, unless you can get well away from him as you lead him. It's safer to stay on him than to risk slipping and falling. Once you go down, your horse may then inadvertently slide into or run over you. If the footing is that treacherous, you won't have any better traction than your horse, especially if you're wearing smooth-soled riding boots. He has four legs for balance; you have only two.

If you do need to dismount, stay well out of your horse's way and off to the side, in case he slides or falls. Dismount off his right side, if it seems safer.

Even if you're traveling on dry, safe terrain, beware of shaded areas and north-facing slopes that don't get much winter sun. These areas may still be frozen and treacherous.

#### HAZARD #4: Ice

**Why it's hazardous:** All ice is treacherous, from frozen puddles and ice-covered streams to melted snow that's re-frozen. A heavy, wet snow that then freezes to the ice can provide a little traction, but a wet snow or rain that freezes over ice will just make it even

more slippery. A fine, powdery snow on ice may also make it more slippery.

On ice, your horse can easily lose his footing, scramble, and fall down, then have trouble getting up again. If your horse does the "splits," he may seriously injure himself, as well as put you at risk as he struggles and falls.

**What you should do:** Avoid riding across patches of ice, if at all possible.

Watch for ice hidden under fresh snow, which is especially treacherous. If you suspect there's ice under the snow in a certain spot, go around it.

If you ride frequently in winter, consider

shoeing your horse with traction in mind. Consult your farrier for options.

#### HAZARD #5: Packed snow

**Why it's hazardous:** Packed snow can be just as slippery as ice. A polished trail or road, packed by hoof traffic or vehicles, is ice, and very slippery indeed.

**What you should do:** Try to find a path through undisturbed snow, which is much less slippery than a packed track. Ride to the side of the trail if you need to. If you're traveling with a group, keep in mind that while the ride leader may be gaining traction in fresh, undisturbed snow, the horses who follow will be on slippery, packed snow.

The ride leader should go slowly to allow for this hazard.

#### HAZARD #6: Freezing rain/ice storm

**Why they're hazardous:** Your horse is at great risk for an injury-inducing fall. Unlike other hazards, which you might be able to go around, ice coats every surface. Preparing for a ride, or if you dismount, you're likely to slip and fall.

**What you should do:** If all surfaces

are coated with ice, choose a better day for a ride. If you're on a long ride and get caught in freezing rain or an ice storm, choose the safest route home possible. Keep to a walk, and avoid sloping ground, even if it means going a longer way around an area of risky footing.

#### HAZARD #7: Slippery mud/deep mud

**Why they're hazardous:** Wet, slippery mud puts your horse at risk for a fall. Deep mud also increases your horse's risk of falling, as he may not be able to pull his feet up quickly enough to catch himself, especially if he hits mud unexpectedly.

Also in deep mud, your horse may struggle and flounder, possibly pulling muscles, tendons, or ligaments, or damaging joints. As he struggles, he may kick off a shoe. The mud itself can pull off a shoe.

**What you should do:** In slippery mud, see the precautions for negotiating frozen ground (Hazard #3), especially on hills. If the trail is dry, still watch out for shaded areas, such as timbered slopes, where the ground may still be wet and muddy. Also watch for wet soil over frozen ground, especially as spring approaches.

In deep mud, keep your horse calm, and go slow; it takes extra effort for him to pull his feet out at each step. If he moves faster than a walk (or tries to jump over or through a muddy area) and becomes mired, his momentum may throw him down head over heels, taking you with him.

If you must dismount in mud, scrape the mud off the bottom of your boots before you remount. Muddy boots can slide out of the stirrups, impeding your balance. Use a rock, sagebrush—whatever is available—to remove the mud. ★

All ice is treacherous, from frozen puddles and ice-covered streams to melted snow that's re-frozen.

Seasoned equine journalist Heather Smith Thomas, a lifelong horsewoman and cattle rancher, is based in eastern Idaho.



# YEARS AHEAD



**WE'RE YEARS AHEAD IN SENIOR RESEARCH SO YOU CAN HAVE MORE GOOD YEARS WITH YOUR HORSE.**

Purina Equine Senior® and Senior Active® horse feeds are backed by unparalleled research and our years of supporting the unique needs of horses as they age. Both patented feeds include ActivAge® Prebiotic Technology to support optimal immune function, mobility and appropriate metabolic response in aging horses. With Outlast® Supplement, they also support your horse's gastric health and comfort. Trust the future for your old friend to the #1 equine vet recommended senior horse feed.

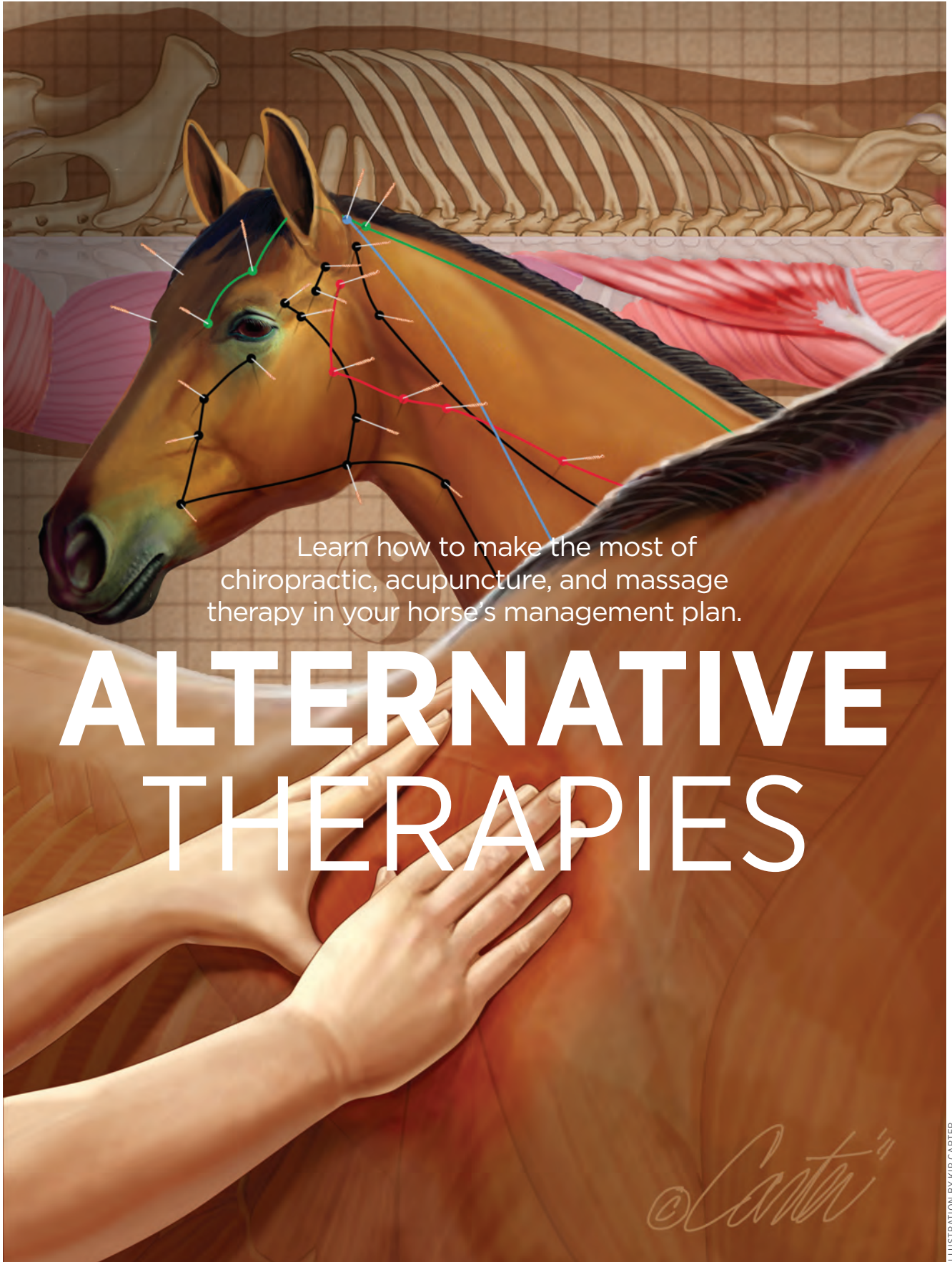
**Put our research to the test at [purinamills.com/equine-senior](https://www.purinamills.com/equine-senior)**

**ActivAge®**  
PREBIOTIC TECHNOLOGY

**OUTLAST**  
GASTRIC SUPPORT  
SUPPLEMENT



FEED GREATNESS®



Learn how to make the most of  
chiropractic, acupuncture, and massage  
therapy in your horse's management plan.

# ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

*© Carter*

ILLUSTRATION BY KIP CARTER

The horse, an accident victim, was barely able to stand in his paddock, and when we asked him to move, he'd bear no weight on the leg at all. He was sweating, with a heart rate of 100, meaning his pain was severe and unrelenting. Even worse, the accident had happened seven days ago, and instead of calling a veterinarian, the owners

This is a frightening example of an alternative-therapy choice gone bad, and similar episodes happen way too frequently. Yet acupuncture, chiropractic, and equine massage therapy can be valuable parts of your horse's management plan when used appropriately by a qualified practitioner. In our practice, we work closely with a variety of thera-

they are, when to use them, and how to choose a qualified practitioner who'll help your horse and do no harm.

## 7 STEPS FOR SUCCESS

Before you call that alternative-therapist number passed along to you by a friend of a friend, protect your horse by following these steps.

### STEP 1: DIAGNOSE

First and foremost, if your horse has a musculoskeletal problem, you'll be most successful getting him back to work if you know what's wrong—and more often than not this should begin with your veterinarian, who can do a lameness work-up in pursuit of a specific diagnosis.

Why is this so important? Because an injury like a torn suspensory ligament or broken bone is generally best identified and managed using conventional medical treatments. And in some cases, such as a neck or pelvic fracture, it's downright dangerous for a horse to have certain manipulations performed.

Does that mean alternative therapies should be avoided altogether in these cases? Absolutely not. They can be extremely valuable for pain management and to address compensatory issues. In some cases, they can even contribute to the healing process. It just means they should be applied with care—which requires an accurate diagnosis from the start.

### STEP 2: CHOOSE WISELY

A key element to success is to choose your practitioner carefully. A properly trained chiropractor, acupuncturist, or body worker will refer you to your veterinarian when it's appropriate, and won't apply therapy until an underlying problem is diagnosed and treated. Begin by seeking a practitioner who's certified, ideally through one of the organizations listed later in this article.

These organizations all boast rigorous education and testing procedures,

It's important to have a plan to decide if you need to call a veterinarian or use alternative therapies in your horse's management plan.

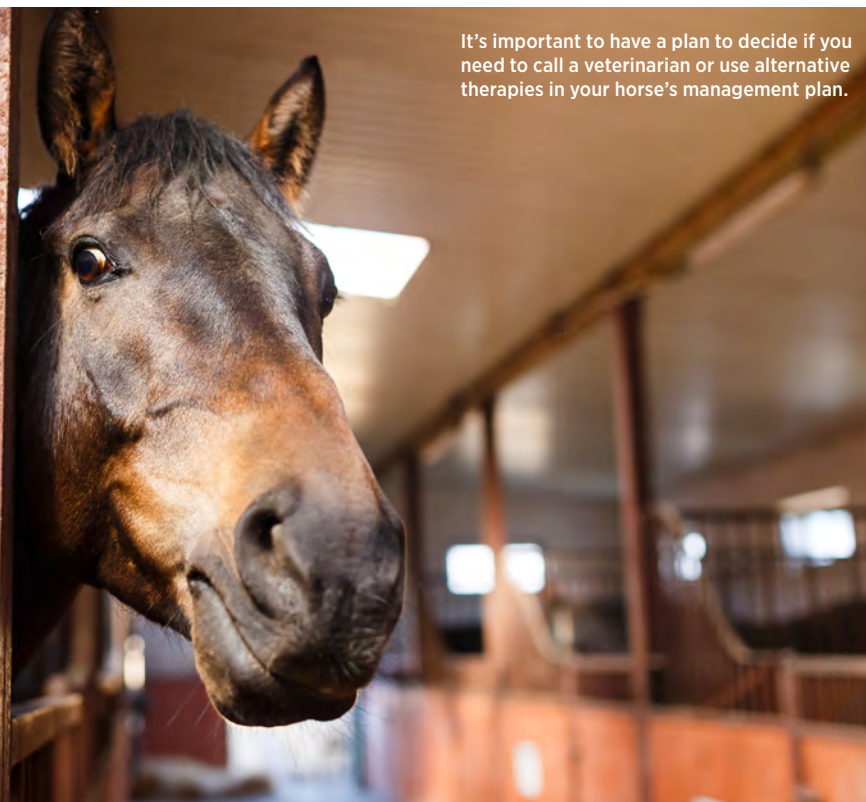


PHOTO BY CASTENOID/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

had opted to call a local “chiropractor” who'd performed an adjustment and recommended four grams of bute a day for the following week until the horse could be seen again. The adjuster owned a gas station in town, and had learned to “crack backs” from his next-door neighbor.

Sadly, the adjustment did nothing for the fractured tibia seen on radiographs, and even if it could've been repaired, it was too late by the time the owners finally decided to call their vet. The horse was also in severe kidney failure, most likely due to toxic doses of bute.

pists who help us manage chronic back pain in hard-working performance horses, keep our older horses comfortable in their retirement, or provide relief from compensatory pain following a severe injury.

The key is knowing when to use these modalities, and who to call for help.

I'll outline seven key steps to follow that'll help you make the most of alternative therapies in your horse's management plan. I'll also explain basic information on acupuncture, chiropractic, and massage, outlining what

meaning a practitioner with one of these certifications is guaranteed to have received a certain amount of training and to have demonstrated a level of knowledge and competence with which you can feel comfortable. If your therapist claims to be “certified” but not through one of the organizations listed, ask questions before you allow him or her to work on your horse. A wide variety of training programs exist, and some programs are better than others. Many issue their own “certificates” when the course is completed, but a piece of paper doesn’t necessarily equal valid certification.

If this is what you discover, ask some specific questions about the amount of training your chosen therapist has really had. Be aware of a non-veterinarian therapist who recommends prescription medications without consulting with your vet. This can often be a red flag that the therapist is unclear about where the boundary between him or her and the veterinarian should lie—which could not only mean trouble if medications are misused, but also raises a concern about whether he or she will appropriately involve the veterinarian for other aspects of your horse’s care.

### STEP 3: INVOLVE YOUR VET

Your veterinarian should remain an important part of your horse’s management plan—even when you turn to alternative therapies that are outside his or her direct expertise. In fact, your vet usually will be familiar with most or all of the individuals offering alternative therapies in your area, and can probably direct you to the most competent person who’s most likely to help your horse.

In our practice, we have close working relationships with a number of alternative therapists in our area. We chose to develop these relationships because the individuals are well trained, know when it’s not safe or appropri-

ate to work on a horse with a specific problem, and maintain open channels of communication regarding horses in our care.

The result? When we all work as a team rather than as solo artists, your horse is more likely to get better.

### STEP 4: BE PREPARED

Once you’ve decided on a therapy and selected a qualified practitioner, it’s important to be prepared for your

lected is conscientious and well trained.

As with any visit for medical care, make sure your horse is in the barn, clean and dry, and ready for your appointment. Also have any medication information or other medical history at your fingertips.

### STEP 5: TELL THE TRUTH

Have you ever paused when filling out that medical history form, wondering whether that nighttime glass of wine re-



PHOTO BY BMF-FOTO.DE/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

If your alternative therapist detects any type of lameness, heat, or swelling on the body, he or she will likely recommend calling your veterinarian.

appointment. The therapist is likely to request a full medical history, including information from your veterinarian about chronic conditions or recent treatments. He or she generally will perform some kind of exam on your horse, and decide on a treatment plan according to his condition.

If the therapist detects any type of lameness, heat, or swelling on the body, or sign of a systemic illness, chances are he or she will recommend your horse be seen by your regular veterinarian prior to administering treatment. Don’t be frustrated if this happens. Instead, see it as a good sign that the person you’ve se-

ally qualifies as “drinks alcohol”? Yes...it does. And if you don’t answer truthfully, it could have a significant impact on your health care.

The same holds true for your horse. If your acupuncturist, chiropractor, or massage therapist asks you about the type and intensity of work your horse does, about previous lameness or medical problems, or even whether you were able to follow suggestions for after-care, it’s important to be accurate with your answers. Not only will it help your therapist devise the best treatment plan, it’ll also let him or her know whether treatments are being effective. →

After all, if your massage therapist recommends a specific stretching exercise for your horse and you don't do it... it's hard to know whether the treatment plan is working.

## STEP 6: FOLLOW RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to get the best results, you should follow the recommendations of the doctor or therapist who is helping you.

As with any form of treatment, if you want the best results you should follow the recommendations of the doctor or therapist who's helping you. If the acupuncturist tells you to give your horse a day off following treatment, give him a day off. And if the body worker suggests a follow-up exam and treatment in two weeks, make the appointment before he or she leaves your farm.

Just as you can't expect your horse to recover from a disease if you don't administer medications recommended by your veterinarian, it's unlikely you'll see the benefits of treatment if you don't follow the protocol outlined by your acupuncturist, chiropractor, or massage therapist.

## STEP 7: BE REALISTIC

If you want a miracle from alternative therapies, you're likely to be disappointed. Medications can't completely cure every instance of every disease, and likewise, alternative therapies won't fix every problem. If your horse has severe chronic laminitis and Cushing's

at specific locations of the body for therapeutic purposes. This procedure was originally developed by the ancient Chinese, who believed that these anatomic locations were portals in the skin. Through these portals, the ancient acupuncturist could access meridians, or energy channels, that communicated with internal organs.

Experiment-based research has since shown us that these points are actually anatomic locations particularly rich in nerve endings and/or blood vessels. When needles are placed in these locations, neurotransmitters and other local factors are released, starting cascades that ultimately lead to body-wide therapeutic effects. An acupuncture treatment involves placement of needles into the points appropriate for your horse's specific problems.

**When to use it:** Acupuncture is a very effective treatment option to help minimize performance-related muscular soreness or to manage compensatory soreness secondary to other injuries. It's especially likely to be recommended as a first line of treatment for your horse if he suffers from back pain.

Many people don't realize that acupuncture can also be a useful therapy for problems beyond the musculoskeletal system. For example, a mare with decreased fertility may be having difficulty clearing fluid from her uterus. Acupuncture can help lead to smooth muscle contractions of the uterus, thereby helping the mare clean herself out.

Or, if your horse has allergy problems (hives, skin rashes, or a chronic cough), acupuncture, in combination with medical therapy, can help control symptoms and improve his response to other medications. Acupuncture may even be used to relieve jaw pain following a dental procedure, or to help quiet intestinal spasms that occur during an acute colic.

**Who does it?** Three primary programs are recognized for acupunc-

disease, for example, acupuncture may help relieve his pain, but it's not likely to cure his disease. And if your horse has hock arthritis, your massage therapist may help relieve muscle spasms in his back and hindquarters to increase his comfort, but the horse is still likely to experience some amount of chronic lameness.

But if you follow all of the steps outlined above and have realistic expectations, the following alternative therapies can make a valuable contribution to your horse's overall good health.

## ACUPUNCTURE

**What it is:** Acupuncture is a procedure in which tiny needles are inserted

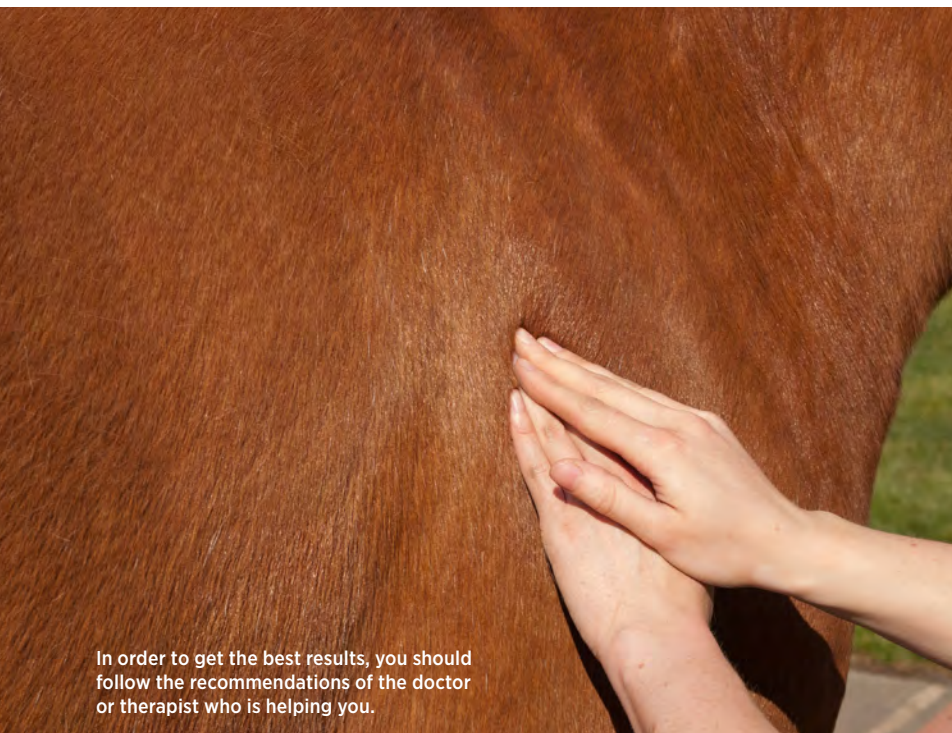


PHOTO BY WIKEDABELL/GETTYIMAGES.COM

ture training, and each has a slightly different emphasis. All three require that students be licensed veterinarians, with the exception that third- and fourth-year veterinary students and veterinary technicians can participate in some courses. The practitioner you select should be able to provide credentials from one of the three.

The Chi Institute ([tcvm.com](http://tcvm.com)) focuses on traditional Chinese medicine with the underlying belief that needles are a way to unblock energy channels within the body. To become a certified veterinary acupuncturist with the Chi Institute, a veterinarian must complete approximately 130 hours of course work (four sessions of approximately three and a half days each); pass a written and practical exam; submit a case report; and log an additional 30 hours of internship, either by shadowing a CVA practitioner in the field or enrolling in advanced courses.

The Colorado-based Medical Acupuncture for Veterinarians course ([colovma.org](http://colovma.org)) is at the other end of the spectrum. This course emphasizes Western medical acupuncture based on neuroanatomy and physiology—a more scientific-based approach. Similar to the Chi Institute's requirements, certification through this program requires veterinarians to complete 140 hours of course work (four sessions of 35 hours each), and pass both a clinical and practical exam.

Finally, the philosophy of the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society ([ivas.org](http://ivas.org)) lies somewhere in the middle. One stated goal of this organization is to integrate traditional Chinese medicine and Western veterinary science. For certification, the IVAS program requires approximately 160 hours of course work, a written and practical exam, a case report, and a 40-hour internship with an IVAS-certified practitioner.

## CHIROPRACTIC

**What it is:** Chiropractic involves manip-

ulation of the bones to restore proper alignment of the vertebrae or other joints when they've been disrupted. The bones of the spine and joints should be maintained in a specific alignment, and any change in that alignment is called a subluxation. Subluxation can impact nerves, muscles, and joints in the surrounding area, which can cause pain and discomfort. A subluxation may even have an effect on other organs in the body due to the disruption of nerve supply and blood flow.

**When to use it:** Chiropractic adjustment can be particularly useful for horses with back pain, especially when the condition is accompanied by visible asymmetry such as a horse that travels crooked, carries its tail to one side, or has a consistent head-tilt. Stiffness and training issues unassociated with apparent lameness often will respond well to chiropractic therapy. The well-trained chiropractor will examine your horse carefully to identify any subluxations, and then will make necessary adjustments.

**Who does it?** The American Veterinary Chiropractic Association (refer to [animalchiropractic.org](http://animalchiropractic.org) or [avcdoctors.com](http://avcdoctors.com)) is the most widely recognized group that certifies chiropractic practitioners in the U.S. To be AVCA-certified, a practitioner must be a licensed veterinarian or chiropractor. He or she is required to attend a program from one of five approved schools. The training involves approximately 220 hours of course work covering a range of topics from basic anatomy and physiology to specific adjustment techniques.

Veterinarians are required to take special courses covering chiropractic theory and techniques, while chiropractors are required to take additional coursework on basic veterinary medicine. Following this training, candidates must pass both a written and clinical examination. Recertification is required every three years, and requires 30 credit hours of continuing education.

## MASSAGE/BODY WORK

**What it is:** Massage therapy or body work involves hands-on manipulation of muscles to help improve circulation, relieve muscle spasms, and increase range of motion. Practicing therapists use not only massage techniques, but also stretches or other exercises in their work.

**When to use it:** Massage therapy can be beneficial for your horse in a wide variety of situations. Like acupuncture, it'll help minimize performance-related muscular soreness, and can be especially useful for managing compensatory soreness secondary to other illnesses or injuries. If your horse has back pain, massage therapy is likely to be a valuable part of his management plan. Massage therapists often use acupuncture points as trigger points in their work.

**Who does it?** Consumer beware: Unlike acupuncture and chiropractic, massage-therapy training programs don't require participants to be veterinarians. In addition, a large number of programs offer "certificates" for coursework completion, making it more difficult to determine which therapists are truly qualified to work on your horse. Training offered ranges from weekend courses to extensive programs that educate students in anatomy, physiology, and biomechanics, as well as basic and advanced massage techniques.

Although there's no single certification shared by most massage therapists, the International Equine Body Workers Association ([iebwa.com](http://iebwa.com)) is one to look for. To become an IEBWA member, a practitioner must complete at least 150 hours of coursework from a recognized school, submit case studies, and complete an externship as well as pass a practical hands-on test. To maintain this certification, members are required to have 16 hours of continuing education each year and carry professional liability insurance. ★