



Recently I have seen quite a few horses with specific neck problems. These were from a variety of causes but one piece of advice that I usually give is about feeding position to help recovery and prevent future recurrence of problems.

Feeding position

A horse's natural way of feeding is from the ground. It's neck muscles and joints are designed to be used in this position and with the head down the jaw is in its correct alignment and the teeth can wear more evenly. The health benefits of feeding hay and concentrate at floor level include:

- *Slowed rate of consumption*--The horse must be more meticulous in his chewing to hold onto the hay and grain he's processing. Compared to chest-high intake, each mouthful of floor-fed feed is smaller, more thoroughly chewed and better mixed with saliva, lowering the horse's choke and colic risks.
- *Improved processing*--Increased chew time and greater salivation prepare each bite for more complete nutrient extraction down the line, increasing the nutritional benefits from each bite.
- *Reduced intake of respiratory irritants*--Eating with a lowered head encourages airway drainage, the first line of defence against deep inhalation of feed-related particles and dust.

Hay nets are very convenient and prevent waste but if your horse has neck issues, suffers from breathing problems or is prone to coughing it is best to feed hay off the floor.



I still frequently see hard feed fed in mangers hung on doors. There really is no good reason to do this. Just watching the horse eat in this position you can see that they are having to twist their head in an unnatural way. This means the jaw and neck joints working at angles they are not designed to and this can create problems.



Even if your horse currently has no specific problem with its neck I would suggest to everyone to feed hard feed off the floor. Should your horse have a tendency to kick buckets over put them in an old tyre.

Piece of string

Another common cause of neck and poll problems is pressure from the head collar when a horse pulls back whilst being tied up. The problem occurs when the piece of string that they are tied to doesn't break. We all learn that we need to tie to a piece of string, not directly to something solid so that it can break if the horse panics. Unfortunately baling twine is often used and this does not break under pressure, unless it is old and already half-worn through.

When a horse gets a fright and suddenly pulls back the head collar can then cause the atlas (the first neck vertebra) to be pulled slightly out of alignment as well as causing muscle spasm in the delicate area around the poll. So please make sure that whatever your horse is tied to will break if he pulls back suddenly.



Quote of the month

Horse, thou art truly a creature without equal, for thou fliest without wings and conquerest without sword. ~ The Koran

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