


Managing Stress at the Horseshow; tips for riders, their families & coaches

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Four Basic Truths About Stress



And you thought there was stress in your life!

- Not all stress is bad.
- Too much stress *is* bad.
- What you perceive to be stressful to you...is.
- You can choose to control much of the stress in your life. [but not all of it]

Colbert 2005



Why be concerned about stress and horse shows?

- Improvement of skills A certain level of challenge (or stress) is needed.
- Stress Management IS a life skill.
- Personality/attitude changes Horse or human
- Physical issues Horse or human
- Conflict
 - Family
 - Human-human
 - Horse-human (leading to ethical and/or welfare issues?)
 - Horse-horse
- Sportsmanship
 - Character Counts etc.



What IS Stress?

- Stress is a mind-body arousal in response to a *stressor* that can save our lives or fatigue body systems to the point of malfunction and disease.
- Stress can be motivating, energizing, exciting and fun; it can challenge us to greater endeavor.

Girdano et al., 2001

Acute
vs.
Chronic



What causes stress?

- Change
- Overload
- Frustration
- Boredom & Loneliness
- Relationships



Four Categories of Stressors

- Physical-lack of sleep, overwork, excessive exercise, physical injury, trauma etc.
- Psychological-Anxiety, fear, finances anger, hostility, depression,
- Chemical-Sugar, caffeine, stimulants, nicotine, pollution etc.
- Thermal-Exposure to extremes in temperature for prolonged periods of time.

What causes stress at horse shows?

- Change
- Overload
- Frustration
- Boredom & loneliness
- Relationships



Do you ever feel stressed at horse shows?

What causes it?
Exercise 1

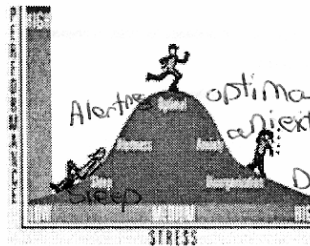
Who may show signs of excess stress at horse shows?

- Exhibitors
- Families
- Coaches/leaders/trainers
- Show staff
- Judges
- Horses!



Stress and Performance

Stress Performance Connection



Signs of Stress & Burnout in Riders

- Generalized anxiety around lessons or shows.
- Chronic or pre-show jitters, nervous stomach, insomnia.
- Feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities and time demands related to competing.
- Doubts about whether or not "it's worth it".
- Not looking forward to lessons, rides or shows. Finding excuses to avoid them.

Signs of Stress & Burnout in Riders

- Chronic irritability, fatigue, blues.
 - Unrealistic fears of injury to self or horse.
 - Increasing frustration with losing at shows.
 - Increasing impatience with horse and his/her needs.
 - Guilt over time sport is taking on family.
 - Feeling the need to "do well" to justify competing.
- Dr. Janet Sasson-Edgette

Signs of Stress & Burnout in Families

- Family comes home from a show, everyone is irritable and no one is talking to anyone else.
- The exhibitor does not want family members to come to shows.
- Parents start thinking "I don't know what to say to him/her anymore." (about losing OR winning)
- Family members feel used.
- Worries about time or money management.
- Increased numbers of squabbles.
 - Dr. Janet Sasson-Edgette

Physical/Behavioral effects of stress in humans

- ↑ heart rate, adrenaline, blood pressure, muscle tension.
- GI disturbances-butterflies in the stomach
- Frequent trips to the bathroom!

Changes in Attentional Focus

- As arousal increases, field of vision decreases. (Easterbrook)
 - Cutting off other riders
- Attention in sport must be adjustable from internal to external like a zoom lens. Excessive stress effects athlete's ability to adjust.
 - Pattern mistakes, lack of focus on people outside of the ring (or inside).

How do you cope with stress at the horse show?

Exercise 2

Tips for managing stress at horse shows

- PRACTICE AT HOME!
- With enough practice, motor skills can be performed with little conscious attention.
 - Walk, trot, lope/canter, back, pivot,
- Do not change your program for an individual judge. Ever.
- Attend as many shows as you can prior to "the big ones". Figure out how much time things take etc.

Tips for managing stress at horse shows

- Have a plan and work that plan.
 - Schedule in time to work, bathe, band etc.
 - Do major clipping at home.
 - Also schedule time to eat and sleep.
 - Drink plenty of water.
 - Make sure you have everything you need before leaving home.
 - Checklists.
 - Two of smaller things in trailer.
 - "Get dressed mentally" for each class. Then "dress" your horse.

Tips for managing stress at horse shows

- Goal Setting
 - Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time sensitive.
 - On-going process.
 - Short term and long term.
 - Break down what it will take to achieve your goals.

Tips for managing stress at horse shows

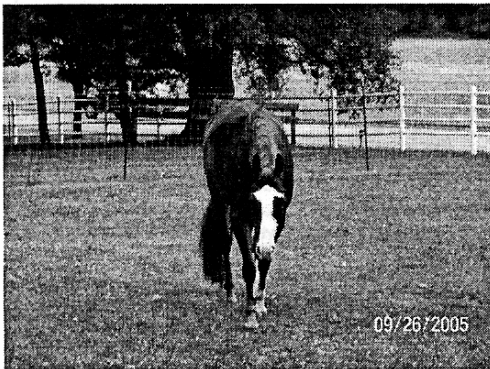
- Identifying negative thoughts.
 - Band exercise.
 - Give your self a set amount of time to be "mad". Choose location wisely.
- Thought stopping.
- Sources of inspiration.
 - Pictures, ads, quotes.
- The Riding Resource Room
- Playlists on your i-Pod

Tips for managing stress at horse shows

- Relaxation techniques-Yoga, meditation, deep breathing exercises.
- ...Combined with cue words or songs.

How will you cope with stress in the future?

Exercise 3



The Riding Resource Room

Make a positive poster to keep in your trailer to help focus thoughts and inspire yourself.

Typical Sources of Stress in my Sport-Exercise 1



Outside the arena

1. parking arrangements
2. show committee changes
3. people vs. people conflicts
4. vehicle issues
Tack changes

Inside the arena

1. uncooperative horse
2. people talking from across ring
3. Scared of judges
- 4.

How I cope with stress now-Exercise 2

1. Deep breathing
2. manage eating
3. get there early
4. practice at home - do your homework
5. Do not change your program for an individual
6. judge ever.
attend as many shows as you can prior to "the big ones". figure out how much time things take etc.

New ways to Cope with Stress-Exercise 3

1. Be prepared and organized. Time Management
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.