

# EQUUS EXTRA

VOLUME 79



BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



## SPRING PREP

- 5-point preseason checklist for riders
- Preventive care for your horse
- Protect against training injuries



# Signs of lameness or joint issues? Take *control*.

Introducing Spryng™ with OsteoCushion™ Technology, a naturally-derived injectable veterinarian medical device that creates a shock-absorbing matrix — to work with synovial fluid and mimic the protective form and function of natural, healthy joint cartilage.



To learn more, visit [SpryngHealth.com](https://SpryngHealth.com)

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A veterinary medical device

## SIMPLE

Single injection  
with rapid results

## LONG LASTING

Long duration  
of joint protection

## INNOVATIVE

Address the affliction — helps  
to restore proper joint mechanics

### A veterinary medical device, not a drug

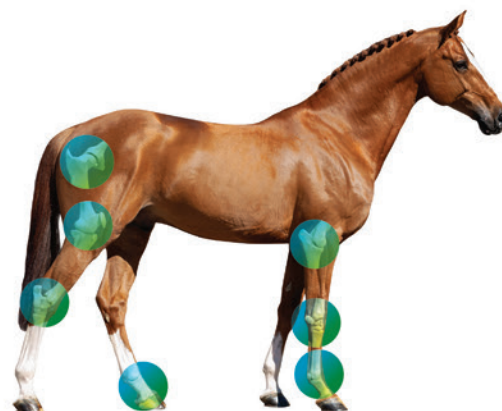
Spryng™ with OsteoCushion™ Technology takes the treatment of lameness issues into a new arena by addressing the root cause of the conditions — missing and damaged cartilage. Spryng™ aids in the management of joint pain from the loss of cartilage or tissue-bone mechanical malfunction caused by joint dysfunction.

### Immediate joint protection

When injected into the joint, Spryng™ creates a sponge-like, shock-absorbing matrix — that works with synovial fluid to mimic the protective form and function of natural, healthy joint cartilage.

### Long-term joint reinforcement

Spryng™ also provides a natural scaffold, potentially protecting the joint from further injury, unlike other lameness management options that may only mask symptoms.



Spryng™ with OsteoCushion™ Technology aids in the management of joint pain from the loss of cartilage or structural changes caused by osteoarthritis, lameness issues or degenerative joint disease.

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A full-page background image showing a rider from behind, wearing a helmet and a grey hoodie, riding a dark horse through a sun-dappled forest. The horse is in motion, kicking up some dirt or leaves. The title 'Your preseason checklist' is overlaid in large white text.

# Your preseason checklist

Before the riding and showing schedule heats up, use this five-point checklist to make sure you and your horse will be ready to go.

**A**t this time of year, even in the northernmost climes, green shoots are at last poking through the soil in pastures and robins can be seen flitting down fence lines. But at many barns there's another sure sign of spring: riders pulling tack out of storage and restocking their grooming kits in eager anticipation of the first big trail ride, show or clinic of the season.

Those debut outings can be a little rough, though. Horses who are otherwise sensible and sedate may jig and bolt. Others lag behind the group, too winded to keep up. One horse may be tender footed and another so rotund after a lazy winter that his saddle no longer fits. And then there are the practicalities to contend with: leaky buckets, flat tires

*By Dee McVicker and  
Christine Barakat*





and crucial travel paperwork that somehow got misplaced.

Of course, you'll be able to muddle through, but wouldn't it be nice to skip false starts and frustrations as you get ready for peak riding and showing season? There are no guarantees, of course, but with a little planning and preparation, you can keep unpleasant surprises to a minimum as you get your horse ready for your first major event of the year. To help you, here's a basic pre-season checklist—start with these areas and add your own based on your goals and your horse's needs.

## 1. HEALTH STATUS

Any horse about to head back to work after several months of relative ease will benefit from a visit from the veterinarian. Not only will a spring checkup take care of routine health-care issues, but it can uncover developing

problems that might worsen later in the season.

You may also want to request a brief lameness exam. A veterinarian may detect mild joint soreness, the slight thickening of a tendon or other subtle signs of trouble that are best addressed early. If anything suspicious appears, ask your veterinarian whether this would also be a good time to take radiographs to look for any changes in chronic orthopedic conditions and to establish a new baseline for comparison in subsequent exams.

This visit is also the time for spring vaccines, giving your horse's immune system a chance to arm itself before insects are out in full force and your horse begins traveling. Which ones your horse needs depends on his age, your geographic location and your plans for the year. Immunizations against rabies, tetanus, West Nile virus and eastern

and western equine encephalitis—the “core vaccines”—are recommended for all horses, but your veterinarian may suggest additional shots to protect against strangles, influenza or other diseases based on your horse's particular risk.

If your plans include traveling to shows, clinics or other organized events, you'll want your veterinarian to pull blood for a Coggins test and prepare other necessary health paperwork that such venues generally require.

Look into what you'll need well in advance—some shows and other venues have new requirements that include specific vaccinations. Make multiple copies of these right away. Keep one set in your truck and another in your tack box to increase the odds of being able to find a set when you need them. Keep the originals in the house for safekeeping.

## 2. WEIGHT

Weight gain and loss can be easy to overlook under winter blankets and heavy hair coats. Weight changes affect everything from saddle fit to systemic health, so you'll want to get a clear idea of your horse's status and decide how you'll manage it well before your first competition, event or major trail outing.

Get a literal “feel” for how much body fat your horse is carrying with a vigorous grooming session using a curry and your hands. Consult a body condition score chart if you're unsure of the meaning of deposits over various anatomical points. A target score for most horses is between 5 and 6.

Also pay attention when you tack up. Weight loss or changes in muscle tone can cause the saddle to bridge across the back or pinch his



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withers. Even if it fit perfectly fine last fall, assess your horse's tack as if it were brand new and be prepared to make accommodations until his body condition normalizes: Often, you can "shim" with pockets of padding or use a swayback pad that will raise the saddle up off the back until your horse returns to his usual fitness level. If your horse has gained considerable weight, you may have to temporarily substitute another saddle that has a wider tree.

You may also be tempted to make immediate adjustments to your horse's diet. But be mindful of how his lifestyle and environment may be changing in

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the coming months.

For instance, pounds may melt away as a horse's workload increases even if you don't reduce his grain ration. And a return of spring pastures may help a lean horse fill out in the coming weeks. Talk to your veterinarian before making any nutritional adjustments (that first veterinary check-up is a good time to have the conversation) and then implement any recommended changes slowly.

If your horse has a history or risk of arthritis, look into the benefit of starting a joint supplement while you are considering diet and nutrition. A "loading" dose of a supplement you are currently giving may also be appropriate in the weeks leading up to a return to work, but don't make any such adjustments without speaking to your veterinarian first.

### 3. FITNESS

How much conditioning your horse will need to return to peak form depends on his previous level of fitness, how he spent his downtime and your performance goals for the season. If he has been turned out all winter long in an active herd with space to run he may have retained some of his fitness. You can get back into a regular riding routine with such a horse much more quickly than you can with one who spent most of his winter days confined to a stall. The natural exercise of pasture living, however, won't prepare a horse for the collection, bending, lateral flexion or mental focus that may be required of him in a discipline-specific event.

No matter your sport or discipline, reconditioning starts with slow work—walking and jogging. On your first ride, limit your time in the saddle to less than an hour

at this slow speed. Then, over the course of several weeks, increase the speed or distance of your rides, but never both at the same time. Pay attention to your horse's level of fatigue. You'll need to push him a bit to increase his fitness, but be careful to avoid exhausting him. A return to fitness will stall if a horse needs weeks or months off to recover from an injury.

A heart rate monitor can help you keep track of your horse's increasing fitness: A well-conditioned horse's heart rate will usually return to below 60 beats per minute within 10 or 15 minutes of stopping exercise. But remember that it's not just cardiovascular fitness that matters. Your horse's tendons, bones

**A target body condition score for most horses is between 5 and 6, but keep in mind this isn't a measure of fitness but simply body fat.**







and ligaments need time to adapt to the demands of work as well.

Be sure to add in recovery days to your fitness regimen. A horse's body will rebuild stressed structures during downtime, which leads to the increased strength you're aiming for. You'll need to work a horse at least four times a week to improve his fitness, but at least two very easy rides or completely off days in the pasture are equally important.

After a few weeks of foundation work, you can add in discipline-specific skill work, such as jumping, spins or stops. Avoid repetitive drills. Not only do they stress a horse physically, but they can cause him to burn out mentally before you even hit the show circuit. Changing up your daily routine not only keeps a horse emotionally "fresh" but challenges various part of his body physically.

## 4. TRANSPORT

Whether your first big event of spring is a clinic, show or organized trail ride, chances are you'll need to trailer to the location. Don't wait until the day before to give your rig a once-over, though. An unsafe or unusable trailer will make all your horse-specific preparations for naught.

If you're not mechanically savvy, you may want a mechanic to take a look at your trailer if it has been parked all winter. If you're comfortable doing the inspection yourself, however, you can work through the vehicle on your own, looking for trouble spots.

Start by ensuring the hitch is still easy to operate and that the welds that attach it to the trailer look solid. Any cracks are a serious concern and need to be addressed before you do any transport. Next, walk

around the trailer to check the tires. Dry rot may have set in over the winter. You'll recognize it by tiny cracks in the rubber. Tires with dry rot need to be replaced, as do any with treads worn down to less than a quarter-inch deep. If the tires appear to be in good shape, make sure they are inflated to the correct PSI, which should be listed on the sidewall.

Inspect the ramp, making sure it's easy to raise and

lower and is extremely steady underfoot. Look for corrosion in the springs and hinges. Similarly, swing all doors and windows to see whether they move easily.

Make sure the floors are solid. Manure and urine left over winter can cause wood floors to rot and metal to rust. Use a screwdriver to check the integrity of both types of floor; if the tip goes into the material, it needs to be replaced. With a friend's help, test the brake lights and turn signals. Then check that your trailer breakaway line is secure and works so that should your trailer separate from your truck while on the road, your trailer will safely come to a stop.

Finally, make sure your horse still loads willingly. If he was a hesitant loader before his winter break, he may have fallen into bad habits.

But even a seasoned traveler could do well with

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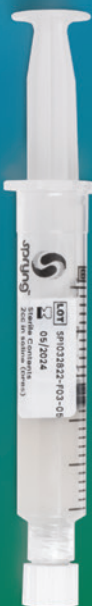





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a reminder session before you're running late on the morning of an event.

If you trailer long distances or frequently, ask your veterinarian about your horse's risk of gastric ulcers and whether he may need medication on trailering days.

## 5. GEAR

Spend an afternoon going through and inspecting your gear, from tack to buckets to sheets to grooming tools. Even if you think it was in good shape when you stowed it last fall, you may not have noticed early signs of failure, or its condition may have deteriorated over the past few months.

Lay out your horse's summer wardrobe over a fence line. This airs the items out while giving you a chance to notice any signs of rodents who overwintered in their depths. Check sheets, saddle pads, traveling boots and other such garments. Wash any that seem less than clean

and make arrangements to repair and replace items as necessary.

Do the same with your grooming tools. Lay them out, clean them up and repack your box with the coming activities in mind. Now's also a good time to order fly spray so you're not caught without it on the first buggy day of the year. Then check season-specific equipment that may have gone

**If the tires appear to be in good shape, make sure they are inflated to the correct PSI, which should be listed on the sidewall.**

unused over the winter. The water containers you keep in the trailer, for instance, may have cracked in the cold. You'll want to know that now, not when you're loading up to hit the road.

It's especially important to scrutinize tack closely. A failure of a stirrup or girth can be dangerous. Check every spot where leather meets metal; tack often fails at these stress points. Any cracking or tearing is cause for replacement. Tug, wiggle and pull all hardware, looking for signs of insecurity or weakness. Also inspect stitching and lacing, which is typically an easy-enough repair, assuming the leather itself is still in good condition.

The adage, "If you fail to plan you plan to fail," might seem a little overstated when talking about a return to riding this spring, but there's certainly some truth to it. An easy transition from idle to active with your horse involves many steps, variables and opportunities for things to go amiss, so the sooner you can start, the more time you'll have to reach your goal. Then, when you enter the ring or head down the trails, those weeks for preparation will pay off. 🐾

*EQUUS thanks Ann Swinker, PhD, extension horse specialist at Pennsylvania State University, and Diana and Lindsay Peaton of Desert Skies Performance Horses in Gilbert, Arizona, for their assistance in the preparation of this article.*



DUSTY PERIN



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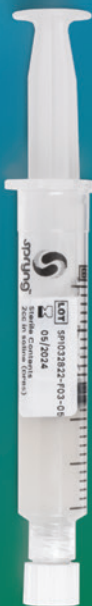



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# 4 WAYS TO PREVENT SPRING TRAINING INJURIES



If your horse has been idle over the winter, take some time to tone him up to avoid injuries from stressing unfit muscles.

**W**armer weather is not far away, and it will feel good to shake off the winter doldrums and get back into the swing of things at the barn. Tempting as it may be to toss a saddle on your horse and head for the hills on the first balmy day of the season, it's important to consider your horse's readiness for the challenge. If you haven't ridden much over the winter, he may have lost some conditioning during his time off, and you may need to spend a few weeks bringing him back to his previous level of fitness.

Pushing a horse into exertion he's not yet ready to handle is a recipe for a number of health issues, including muscle strains as well as tendon and ligament injuries. However, a slow, careful approach—that accommodates his needs while adjusting for weather conditions—will help to get him back into shape and ready for summer activities.





## 1. Assess your horse's current level of fitness.

Heavy winter coats or blankets can obscure changes in a horse's body. Run your hands over your horse to evaluate his general condition. Fitter muscles are bulkier and firmer and don't "jiggle" when handled. Lack of muscle tone will also make bony areas, such as the hips and withers, more prominent, and the crest of the neck will feel flabby. An out-of-shape horse is also likely to have a duller coat and will produce frothy sweat. The less fit your horse is, the more time you need to allow to build his muscles. (If your horse has lost a significant amount of weight over the winter, have him examined by your veterinarian to look for underlying causes.)

**2. Build fitness gradually.** If your horse was well-conditioned last year, you can probably bring him back

into shape in just a few weeks. The earliest stages of any conditioning program require long, slow distance work, mostly at a walk at first, with some intervals of trotting. (See "Sample Conditioning Plan for a Previously Fit Horse," below, for specific guidelines.) Ideally, you'd be able to ride five or more days per week. If you can ride only three days a week, you can still accomplish your goal, but you'll need to add a few more weeks to your plan. If you're riding over trails, choose routes over less strenuous terrain for your earlier ventures.

As your horse's fitness increases, you'll notice he will be less easily winded, his body will become more muscular, and he'll be more "forward" and eager. If you choose to monitor his pulse, you'll note that his heartbeat will return to its normal resting rate sooner after faster, more intense work.





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**3 ■ Watch for bad footing.** Injuries are most likely to occur in the early stages of a training program, when muscles, tendons and other structures are still adjusting to the workload. Couple that with the riding conditions of early spring—thaws that produce mud, which may be obscured under still-melting ice and snow—and the chances for slips, falls and serious injuries increase dramatically. When you encounter slick or uneven footing on a trail, slow to a walk and let your horse pick his own way through or around it.

**4 ■ Keep your horse cool.** You may associate heat stress with scorching summer temperatures, but if your horse still has a thick winter coat, any sweat he produces won't evaporate readily, and he can easily overheat, even on a cool day. Your horse needs to work until he sweats in order to improve his fitness, but if he's getting too hot, ease back on the intensity and allow him plenty of time to cool down and dry out. Clipping the heavy winter coat may be an option, but unless you are prepared to blanket your horse, it's not a good idea if you're still experiencing freezing spells. As always, let your horse drink his fill of fresh water after any workout, and give him access to a salt block.



ADOBE STOCK

## SAMPLE CONDITIONING PLAN FOR A PREVIOUSLY FIT HORSE

Every horse's needs are different, and any fitness program must accommodate the individual. That said, here is a basic framework for a fitness plan designed to bring back a healthy, young horse who was fit the previous year. This protocol is based on riding four

or five times per week. If you're riding only three times per week, add time to the warm-ups and walking sets, and increase the program to 45 days.

**Week 1:** Ride for one hour, mostly walking with a few intervals of trotting that are no more than 10 minutes each.

**Week 2:** Extend the total ride time to 90 minutes, keeping the same amount of trotting.

**Week 3:** Introduce short canter sessions, no more than three minutes each; increase trotting session to 15 to 20 minutes.

**Week 4:** Increase ride length up to two hours, with trot sessions of up to 20 minutes. Keep canters at three to five minutes. Consult your veterinarian or an experienced trainer for specific guidance tailored to your horse's individual needs. ●