



Planning long transports to prevent potential problems

Whether a horse is transported over a short or long distance, it causes stress for the horse... and its owner! There are ways of reducing this stress and its consequences for horses. Studies show that transporting a horse for 12 hours or more has a major impact on cortisol levels (the stress hormone that affects the immune system, among other things), and increases the risk of colic and health problems such as shipping fever. The secret of a successful long transport for your horse's health is planning.

The Trip

It's important to plan the trip well before departure. Plan to stop every 4 to 6 hours for 15 to 20 minutes, especially if the horses don't have access to water during transport. Hydration is the key to preventing impaction colic. Overnight stops should also be planned, ideally by placing horses in a stall, so that they can lie down if necessary and really rest their limbs. It has been shown that muscle enzyme levels rise in the blood during these long transports, so the muscles are very much in demand to maintain a stable position (those who have already done a transport in the trailer with their horses will know!). During these stops, whenever possible, it's a good idea to get the horses moving, to create movement not only for the muscles, but also for the intestinal tract, to prevent colic.

Horses need to urinate an average of 6 times a day, and most of them are unable to do so in the trailer (lack of bedding, inability to position themselves properly, etc.). If horses can't urinate, they run the risk of developing kidney problems. So, it's a good idea to get them off the trailer so they can relieve themselves regularly.

If you're moving from a cold region to a warm one, you can shave the horses to avoid winter hair and unnecessary sweating. If, on the other hand, you're heading back to a colder region, you'll need to plan a gradation of blankets according to the temperature.

The choice of the trailer will also have an impact. Ideally, opt for a trailer with stalls, or in a diagonal position, as it's much easier for a horse to keep its balance in these conditions than in a straight trailer with the horse looking forward.



Hydration and Nutrition

Hydration is a key factor in a horse's health during transport, especially over long distances. There are now water buckets with closing traps or neoprene contours, which allow access to water while avoiding spills. On the other hand, some horses don't want to drink during transport, and here are a few tips to encourage them to do so:

- Keep them well hydrated before leaving. To ensure they are well hydrated before departure, salt (hay salt or cattle salt) can be added to their feed or supplements in the days leading up to the trip, at very little cost and with very good results (between 30 and 90g of salt per day). For very long journeys, an intravenous solution may also be considered.
- Wait until the end of the break to give them water. Most horses don't drink immediately when the trailer stops, but rather 15 to 20 minutes later. It is therefore advisable to offer them some just before setting off again.
- Serve a mash with plenty of water. It can also be made with additional hay, beet pulp or bran. At least 3 times as much water as solids are needed to ensure proper hydration.
- Bring water from home. Horses are very sensitive to the smell of water and may turn up their noses at unfamiliar water.

A horse should have access to hay until at least 1 hour before departure, as travelling on a full stomach reduces the risk or severity of stomach ulcers that may occur. It's also a good idea to put some hay in the trailer so they can nibble along the way. On the other hand, if the horse has no access to water or drinks almost nothing during transport, unlimited hay is not recommended, as all this dry matter increases the risk of impaction colic. In this case, it's a good idea to serve them mash with hay supplements to provide some fibre in the stomach and calm the acidity.

If you can, keep to the same schedule as usual for feed, but serve it wet to increase total water consumption. Don't hesitate to slightly increase the meat rating before transport (6-6.5), as the energy demand is high, to keep them stable on the road.

Long transport involves high cortisol production, which affects the horses' immune system and increases the risk of transport fever. It's a good idea to give them pre-, pro-, and post-biotics before and during transport, as they help support the immune system and prevent this condition. In the same vein, increasing proteins and minerals/vitamin intake (especially antioxidants) will help strengthen the immune system and support muscles by eliminating free radicals.

Adding litter to the trailer has its pros and cons. Litter provides greater comfort, reduces the risk of slipping and allows some horses to urinate. On the other hand, dusty bedding can cause respiratory problems. To reduce the risk to the lungs, it's a good idea to use a dust-free litter and let the horses bend their heads so that the mucus in the respiratory tract can evacuate the dust.

The Arrival and Rest

During a transport of 6 to 12 hours, a horse needs around 24 hours to bring down the level of cortisone in the blood and for the immune system to become less fragile. For transports lasting more than 12h, allow at least 2-3 days' rest.

It's very important to rehydrate the horse on arrival, either by adding salt or electrolytes to the feed, or by administering a solute. This will speed up recovery and greatly reduce the risk of impaction colic.

Pre-, pro-, and post-biotics should be fed for at least 3 weeks after arrival to help the immune and digestive systems adjust to the new environment, new food, etc.

With these precautions, you can be sure that you'll arrive at your destination with a horse that's healthy and ready to compete!

