

## Tips for Coping with Stall Boredom and Stable Vices

*Horses are naturally curious and want to be busy. That's why stall confinement can bring on boredom and stress. Here are some thoughts on why and how to keep your horse occupied in its stall, along with some humane solutions for the common stall vices of kicking and cribbing.*

Nature intended horses to roam throughout the day foraging for vegetation and nibbling small amounts of grass almost continually. These activities keep them occupied and their digestive systems functioning well. As best we can, we simulate the environment nature intended for our horses with daily turnout, regular exercise and plenty of hay given throughout the day. But occasionally, a horse must receive stall rest to recover from an injury or illness, or bad weather forces restricted activity and increased confinement. Confinement can cause stress in horses, and it may bring out undesirable behaviors such as circling, weaving, stall kicking, wood chewing and cribbing.

A small mesh hay net may be your best tool for slowing your horse's hay consumption rate to keep him actively nibbling for a longer time than when hay is served loosely. They're available in small and large sizes and have become popular due to their effectiveness.

### Toys and Amusements

Of course food-related entertainment is naturally the most interesting for your horse. The treats taste delicious, and they satisfy your horse's natural inclination to nibble during the day.

For hours of entertainment, try one of the many hanging treats, such as Uncle Jimmy's Hangin' Balls, Likit's Boredom Breaker and the Jolly Stall Snack System. The hanging treats tantalize your horse, and keep him busy by moving as he tries to taste the treat. He gets just enough licks in to keep him interested. Hang the treat just at the level of the horse's withers, and far enough from the side of your horse's stall so that he cannot pin the toy against the wall to grab hold of the entire treat at once.

Tip: Although you might not initially think of salt as a treat or a toy, a Himalyan Horse Salt Lick hung by its rope offers a savory alternative to sweet treats for your horse. Some horses like to combine sweet tastes with saltier ones and will alternate between the two if given the chance. Himalyan Salt

Licks are available in 2.2 pounds, 4.4 pounds and in the rounded form.

Spinning, wall-mounted toys keep your horse entertained too. Consider the popular Tongue Twister and the Jolly Jumbo Lick, both of which can be loaded with sweet tasting treats. The Horse Pas-A-Fier is a strong, rotating device that keeps your horse's mouth busy with the enticing aroma of apple-scent. Mount any of these toys where your horse can reach it with his neck held naturally and comfortably – not too high nor too low.

A sporty scented Jolly Ball can encourage play in the stall or paddock. It has a handle your horse can use in play or that you can use to hang the ball. Again, choose a height for the toy that is about level with your horse's withers. Jolly Balls are made of durable plastic for rough and tumble play and do not require you to pump in air.

The new Jolly Mega Balls are rapidly becoming a favorite for horses, too. In three sizes, 25", 30" and 40", they're perfect for the paddock. Fun-colored, easy-to-clean covers are available separately for each size Jolly Mega Ball.

### Solutions for Stall Vices

Stall vices are habits that can be detrimental to a horse's health and damaging to your barn. In addition to the many amusements described previously, devices are available to help with two of the most common stall vices – kicking and cribbing.



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## Kicking

Some horses learn to kick their stall doors or walls as a means of getting attention, as an expression of their desire to be let out or as a sign of aggression toward their stable mates. Repeated kicking is harmful to a horse's joints and detrimental to your barn. (And aggravating to hear.) Additionally, kicking can become a learned behavior between stable mates.

QuitKick trains your horse not to kick his stall by streaming two jets of water within a one-second blast the instant he kicks his door or stall wall. The water blasts are harmless but unpleasant for the horse, which soon learns that every kick results in jets of water. Multiple models are available to suit every barn situation. QuitKick-Dutch works with a dutch door; QuitKick for Mesh or Barred Doors is designed for those with full-height mesh or bars; and Total Stall System provides sensors for stall walls and is designed for horses that kick their walls.

If the kicking habit has spread to other horses in the barn, you need only purchase one QuitKick unit. Once a horse has been trained not to kick, the active QuitKick unit can be moved to another horse and replaced with the QuitKick Dummy. This economical unit fools the trained horse into believing the water-filled unit is still in place and prevents the return of the kicking habit.

## Cribbing

Sometimes called wind sucking, cribbing involves a horse swallowing air through its mouth. A cribbing horse latches its mouth onto a surface, such as a wooden stall ledge, feed bucket or gate, in order to arch his neck to gulp air. This gulping sounds like a grunt. Some horses learn how to gulp air without grasping onto a surface with an open mouth; they may press a surface with their upper teeth or chin, or require no surface at all in order to arch their necks sufficiently.

Some evidence exists that cribbing may initially be an attempt by the horse to solve the problem of an upset or acidic stomach caused by stress or lack of sufficient forage, a situation that can be associated with ulcers. A feeling of relief and wellness is believed to be found through the release of natural chemicals in the brain (endorphins) resulting from the repetitive behavior of the cribbing. That pleasant feeling of relief

can rapidly cause the initial behavior to become a habit in the horse, even when stomach issues are addressed. Cribbing is damaging to your barn, but more importantly it is detrimental to your horse's teeth and in some horses, cribbing is thought to make them prone to colic. Allowing a horse to crib isn't helping him.

To stop or slow cribbing once it has become a habit, consider a cribbing collar or cribbing strap. Different models are available and you may wish to try different styles on your horse, as well as different adjustments, to see which offers the best result. All cribbing collars are designed to prevent a horse from arching its neck by pressing at the throatlatch. A cribbing collar or strap should be fitted snugly to be effective, but not too tight; consult a knowledgeable friend, veterinarian or professional trainer for help in adjusting a collar on your horse.

Consider using the popular Miracle Collar for ponies and horses, which offers an anatomical fit that can be used with or without a halter. You might also try a French Cribbing Strap or a Wide Cribbing Strap which are made entirely of leather, or the a Hinged Cribbing Strap that is made of leather but features a metal inset that provides a nutcracker action. Cribbing straps may be cleaned and conditioned to keep the leather soft against a horse's skin, and fitted with a fleece cribbing strap cover for additional comfort without compromising the effectiveness of the device.

In combination with a cribbing strap, you may also want to try a preventative coating such as No Chew or Chew Stop on your horse's favorite cribbing location.

Wood chewing is just that, and it is not the same as cribbing. A horse chews on exposed wooden surfaces of your barn, a habit that is destructive and that has the potential to lead to digestive troubles. If you witness wood chewing starting in your horse, provide extra forage and consult your veterinarian to discuss whether your horse is chewing wood because of a nutritional deficiency. You can then address the wood chewing in several ways. Farnam Quitt is a nutritional supplement that provides a combination of essential vitamins, micro and macro minerals and fatty acids to satisfy a horse's nutritional requirements and eliminate the urge to chew. You can also coat wooden surfaces with a product that makes the wood taste unappealing. In addition to the products mentioned previously, you can also consider Hydrophane Cribbox Anti-Cribbing Paste or Cribbing Eliminator RTU, and cover exposed wooden edges with metal.

