

## LIFESTYLE BASICS: Maximising Movement

by Lezley Golding (AEBM Secretary)



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So you have decided that a barefoot natural herd life is best for your horse. And now you would like to make a smooth transition from shod, rugged, maybe living in solitary confinement, to barefoot, living in a herd. You want to see your equine running with other equines, without "clothes" to inhibit the joy of a good roll or to prevent him from soaking up essential vitamins from the sun through his entire body.

Lezley Golding tells how she made a smooth transition to a barefoot natural lifestyle for her horses, based on her own experiences, and offering tips and pointers for those who do not have big acreage or who have to keep their horses on agistment.

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Many years ago I kept my one horse in a small quarter acre paddock. She was rugged and shod and lived alone. If only I knew than what I know now.

Not so long ago I assisted with horse management at a riding facility. There were up to 14 horses on 35 acres, one being my horse, all rugged and a few shod. But at least there was herd life, and paddocks big enough for free exercise with fellow equines. It was a step in the right direction for me and my horse.

More recently, I moved out of the suburbs and onto a 50-acre farm. The layout of the land was perfect for natural herd life. Over the past year we have taken out most of the old fencing and made four ten acres paddocks. Each paddock has flat and sloping land, a dam, fresh water trough and trees for shelter. We currently have one mixed herd that rotates around the four paddocks. Our 12 horse herd, - ranging in ages from three to 26, consists of four mares, seven geldings of different breeds, quarter horse, arabs, standardbred cross, a warmblood, thoroughbreds, and ponies.

All the horses and ponies in our herd have correct barefoot trims, with no rugs or wraps of any kind, and the only metal shoe on the property is an ornament in my kitchen.

On average, a horse should move between 20-30 km per day over varied terrain. Freedom of movement, 24 hours a day, is vital to the proper development and functioning and health of the entire horse. Since the horse has led this kind of continuous-motion lifestyle for millions of years, its entire physiological makeup has evolved to become perfectly suited for it (and, as such, dependant upon it).

From personal observation of our herd I can tell you that with so many horses together there is always movement. Whether it is from each being constantly reminded of their place in the herd (all herd members have a ranking), time to play, (there is often a sense of playfulness especially amongst the geldings a game of chase, etc) or just moving to the watering hole (trough or dam) If one goes, they all go.

If a horse has insufficient movement, the circulatory system functions below average. And remember that those auxiliary pumps to the heart, the hooves, are not working when the horse is not moving. Lack of movement will cause various regions of the body to receive insufficient blood flow. Horses that stand still a lot, whether in a stable or alone in a paddock, tend to rest with one hind leg cocked. These horses are more likely to develop deformation of the hooves where the inside wall of the hind hooves will grow faster due to reduced pressure. As anyone with arthritis whose health practitioner has advised them to do lots of walking, knows, plenty of movement is good for your bone density and joints. It's just the same for your horse.

### **Ideas for maximising movement**

If a horse has no reason to move it will not move. If you have one horse on its own, get a companion horse. Herd animals are not meant to live alone, anyway and even the most domesticated of horses is driven by the the need to be in a herd to survive. No horse on its own can ever feel truly safe or happy, regardless of how well it is cared for or loved by its human owner.

But of course it can increase the risks of injury many times over for shod horses to be kept together. A light playful kick can cause major damage to another horse when there is a heavy lump of metal on the end of the foot. That's one more mark to chalk up against shoeing and the reason many horse owners won't provide their horse with a companion. But as we already know that horses don't need shoes provided they are correctly trimmed and lead a close-to-natural lifestyle, surely the logical thing to do is to remove the shoes!

### **Open the gates!**

If you have several horses all in small single paddocks (solitary confinement) open up the gates so they can all mix with each other and have more room to move - even to run if they want to.

### **Strategic placing of hay and water**

Put the water at one end of the new area, and the hay at the other end. The horses will have to move between them.

### **"Barefoot only" paddock**

If you keep your horse at an agistment facility, and you are not happy with the arrangements paddocks too small, single paddocks, or the only possibility of sharing is with shod horses, etc - talk to the manager or owner. Ask if they can allocate one bigger paddock for barefoot horses only. If this fails, maybe you need to move your horse to a place where he can have what he/she needs. More and more horse owners across the world are wanting to give their horses a more natural lifestyle. Ask others at your agistment facility maybe some would like to join you.

### **If buying, look for the right land**

If you are lucky enough to be able to buy a property, look for land that is sloping. Exercising on this develops better muscle tone for your horse and you! Larger paddocks are better, especially if you are running more than a few horses, and is less costly when fencing. Make sure you have enough paddocks for rotation. I run a herd of 12 rotating around four 10-acre paddocks. That leaves each paddock resting for 12 weeks. And with paddocks this size and with 12 weeks' rest time, there's no need to pick up manure, so it can be harrowed in. That's like putting free fertiliser back into your land!

Perhaps you thought there was nothing you could do to give your horse more room to move. Think again! Even little changes will give him room for a little more movement every day. And very (barefoot) step he takes is a step in the right direction for his health and his happiness.

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