

Remaining Physical Health

Movement

For a horse to maintain optimal health, he needs plenty of movement. They have a small heart relative to their body size, and movement is a vital part of maintaining circulation, especially when it comes to pumping the blood back up those long, skinny legs.

Given the opportunity they form small groups and travel something like 30 kilometres a day grazing, browsing and seeking water. In addition there would be lots of interacting with each other while they assert dominance and play.

Compare the above to the life of a stabled horse!!! Majorly *boring* with a complete *lack of movement* and zero *fun*. Except when you come along! It is the equivalent of being kept in a cage.

Why racehorses, and other horses from which peak performance is desired, are kept in cages is beyond belief!!

Our leisure/pleasure horses in New Zealand by and large have a good time. Out on pastures with choices to make, buddies to socialize with and room to move. Not as much as would be ideal for them, but far preferable to being 'caged' in a small pen or stable like many horses world-wide.

Fencing Lifestyle Blocks for Maximum Freedom

The idea is to work at getting as close to the ideal scenario as we can, giving them as large an area as possible and letting them be together.

If you have a small block, think about taking fences *out* rather than putting more *in*. You fortunate people moving on to a new block, I thoroughly recommend erecting the bare minimum in the way of fences. Think of the savings, less cost in fencing material, less water troughs, and believe it or not less vet bills from injuries.

Horses injure themselves when they get going and suddenly realize there's a fence or a corner, slam on the anchors and wheel around. If it is slippery they can slide into a fence, or have their legs slide out from underneath them ...womph! Sacro-iliac injuries are commonly caused this way. They can also accidentally roll into a fence.

All things considered, the less fences the better. It means easier access for dressing the soil, liming, making hay etc. If you do need to partition off an area for making hay or something, you can use tape.

You will no doubt have to walk further to fetch your horse (good for you!). A small inconvenience to you, a large increase in quality of life for your horse.

When I lived in Nelson, we kept 8 horses on 6 acres. The place was fenced in post and rail *before* we became aware of the movement thing. It was divided into small paddocks and the horses were kept in pairs. They all used to hang out in the corners, creating patches there with no grass, ideal for rolling except of course they were too close to the fence. Sure enough we go out one morning and one of them had rolled into the fence and was badly injured.

As soon as we realized that the horses would be better off with more area and more freedom, then we wanted to take fences out. As you can well imagine this does not go down well with the head of the house who had spent large amounts of time and money putting them in!! A compromise was reached whereby large gaps were made. We carefully put all the horses together and gave them the run of the whole place. What a difference and did they have fun!

We used to pick up all the manure, morning and night (it doesn't take long if you do it that way). If you are in a situation where you cannot pick up, then divide the available area so that you can rest some after harrowing.