



CHILL OUT

It's easy to spot a relaxed horse, but what about you? **Vicky Jayne Maris** shares her favourite techniques

It takes enormous amounts of energy to be stressed and that prevents you connecting with inner peace that is magnetic to horses.

A horse needs a calm leader, especially when he is stressed, fearful, anxious or tense. If the art of relaxation is mastered you can teach your horse to look to you for guidance, to relax, be calm and think rather than react.

Some people find it hard to switch off. High levels of anxiety and stress damage their equine relationship. If you have lost touch with simply being, slow down, do nothing, relax, be calm and find inner peace. Try just being with your horse.

Relaxation is a state to learn and master. Here are two of my favourite practices.

RELAXATION ENABLES:

Higher achievement and better communication
 Open mindedness and creativity
 Faster, clearer learning plus easier problem solving
 Control of situations by taking the drama out
 Better understanding, control of emotions and a balanced state of mind and energy
 An awareness of everything around you

RELAXED BREATHING

A change in breathing pattern is an early warning signal for horses. They read your breathing pattern so mastering relaxed breathing will benefit your horsemanship.

Good relaxation starts with breathing. Breathe in and out slowly. Fill up the whole of your lungs from the bottom, without forcing. Breathe softly in through your nose and out through your mouth. Practice a regular slow rhythm, counting from one to five for each in breath and the same for each out breath. Don't worry if you can't reach five at first. Practise at home where you won't be disturbed and once you have mastered this you can practice with your horse.

DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

Muscle tension is strongly linked to a state of mind. Horses communicate with body language and they read our bodies too. This technique stretches different muscles in turn and then relaxes them, to release tension from the body and relax the mind. Practice in a warm, quiet place at home first. Here is how to do it.

Start by focusing on your breathing as described above. For each exercise, hold the stretch for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat it a couple of times.

- Face: push the eyebrows together, as though frowning, then release.
- Neck: gently tilt the head forwards, pushing chin down towards chest, then slowly lift again.
- Shoulders: pull them up towards the ears (shrug), and then relax.
- Chest: breathe slowly and deeply into the diaphragm (below your bottom rib) so that you're using the whole of the lungs. Slowly in and slowly out.
- Arms: stretch the arms away

from the body, reach and then relax.

- Legs: push the toes down, then pull them up, relax.
- Wrists and hands: stretch the wrist by pulling the hand up towards you. Stretch out the fingers and thumbs, then relax.

Afterwards quietly enjoy relaxing. When you feel ready, stretch and move about slowly. Master this at home then practice it when you are with your horse. It is a great one to do in the saddle too.

Relaxation increases calmness, reduces anxiety and stress, decreases muscle tension and lowers blood pressure. Turn up feeling relaxed and your horse will notice. Keep using relaxation, intent, balanced energy and calm assertive leadership to take your horsemanship to another level. Notice how other areas of your life benefit too.



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