As we age, we must make changes to our lifestyle in order to maintain skeletal, muscle, and anatomical integrity. This is also true for horses.

While there are many tests that can be performed to assess a horse's condition, horse owners should be proactive in their aging horse's health care in order to prevent health problems from worsening and allow your horse to age as comfortably as possible.

To schedule an appointment with our Large Animal Medicine service to assess the health of your senior horse, call our client service representatives at 352-392-2229. Also be sure to register for our 5th annual Healthy Horses Conference for a full day of equine education on Saturday, April 28.

Veterinary Care

Many horse owners believe that vaccinations or deworming is not important for older horses, but just the opposite is the case as immunity wanes with age. Annual veterinary visits, vaccines, and parasite control keep horses healthy, and keep the horse owner informed of any veterinary-recommended changes to diet or exercise.

Nutrition

Older horses require nutritious feed or supplements due to changes in their bodies, activity levels and eating behaviors. The majority of feed should be a high-quality, easily digestible feed.
digestible roughage, or a complete pelleted feed, adding fat if necessary. Feeding easily digestible food is easier on the horse's system and can trigger better eating habits, helping to keep weight on.

**Body Condition**

Keeping your horse a healthy weight and strength with proper exercise and diet is one of the best things a horse owner can do for their older horse. While keeping weight on can be difficult, a dedicated exercise routine, along with ample warm-up time and a good diet can make all the difference.

**Colic**

The risk and severity of colic increases with age, along with the risk of colic that requires surgery. Read about the colic program at UF, along with ways to help prevent colic from happening and what to do if it does.

**Hoof Care**

There is an increased risk of quarter cracks, abscesses, laminitis, and fractures as horses age, and knowing the early signs of these issues can save costly veterinary or farrier care. Be sure to schedule regular visits with your veterinarian and farrier to diagnose and treat hoof or lameness problems, or consult UF's farrier.

**Dental Care**

Horse’s teeth change as they age due to natural development, vices, injuries or changes in eating behavior. Dental exams for older horses are recommended every six months, but you should schedule an exam with your veterinarian if the following clinical signs are present: weight loss, difficulty chewing, quidding, recurrent choke, or if there are long fibers or grain in the feces.

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## Aging Ailments

**Arthritis**

Older horses have a tendency to become arthritic. Diagnosing arthritis by a veterinarian first requires the horse owner knowing the clinical signs, such as stiffness or lameness. There are many treatment options available, and working with your veterinarian in the initial stages of arthritis can help prevent more invasive treatment options.

**Heaves**

Heaves is recurrent airway obstruction caused by inflammation of the lower airways, typically due to hypersensitivity to inhaled molds and dusts. The clinical signs of heaves may include coughing, nasal discharge, exercise intolerance, post-exercise

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Katherine Davies, UF Veterinary Development Assistant, shows and trail rides her 19-year-old horse, Skip. Katherine keeps him healthy by maintaining a good diet and regular exercise, including letting kids ride him for fun.

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**Cushing's Disease**

Cushing's disease is the loss of dopamine production in the hypothalamus. Horses over the age of seven can get Cushing's disease, but the average age is 19-21 and prevalence of the disease increases drastically after 30 years.

Learn more about Cushing's disease by reading the UF Equine Extension article on equine Cushing's disease and equine metabolic syndrome.
breathing difficulty and a visible "heave" line.

**Diarrhea**
The risk of diarrhea increases with age due to disruption of normal physiological processes. It is common and can be frustrating to diagnose and treat. Some causes are parasitism, IBD, sand, lymphosarcoma, NSAIDs, salmonella, abdominal abscesses and other systemic diseases. Keep your horse properly hydrated at all times and work with your veterinarian to treat diarrhea as soon as it starts.

**Neoplasia**
Neoplasia is the formation of growths, and the risk increases with age. Squamous cell carcinoma tumors or growths may form along the eyes, prepuce and stomach. Other forms of neoplasia are melanomas, lymphoma and adenocarcinoma. If you have a gray horse with melanoma, it may be eligible for our equine melanoma vaccine clinical trial.

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**Equine Metabolic Syndrome**
Equine Metabolic Syndrome is a developed resistance to insulin. *All horses over the age of five are at risk*, but the most common breeds are morgans, paso finos, arabs, fjords and horses with a genetic predisposition. Clinical signs are obesity, regional adiposity, and laminitis.

To learn more about Cushing's and metabolic syndrome, read the UF Equine Extension article on equine Cushing's disease and equine metabolic syndrome.

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**Results from our recent Facebook poll:**

*What is your biggest concern as your horse ages?*

- 40% Proper nutrition/body condition/weight
- 27% Arthritis
- 20% Equine Cushing's & equine metabolic syndrome
- 13% Dental issues

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**Want To Learn More?**

Join the UF College of Veterinary Medicine faculty and staff in our 5th annual Healthy Horses Conference. Healthy Horses is an educational day with a focus on successful equine health care. The day includes lectures, lunch and live equine demonstrations. View this year's brochure and register today!

**This Year's Topics Include:**

- Update on paralysis caused by EHV - Cervical arthritis in horses - How should we be deworming horses? - Equine vaccinations - Q&A on preventative health care - Common myths and misconceptions about feeding horses - Rehabilitating lameness injuries - Q&A panel on equine lameness injuries - Live, high-speed treadmill demonstrations - Lameness Locator™ demonstrations

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Call 352-392-2229 or visit: largeanimal.vethospitals.ufl.edu