

AT A GLANCE

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JOINT

Equine JOINT HEALTH

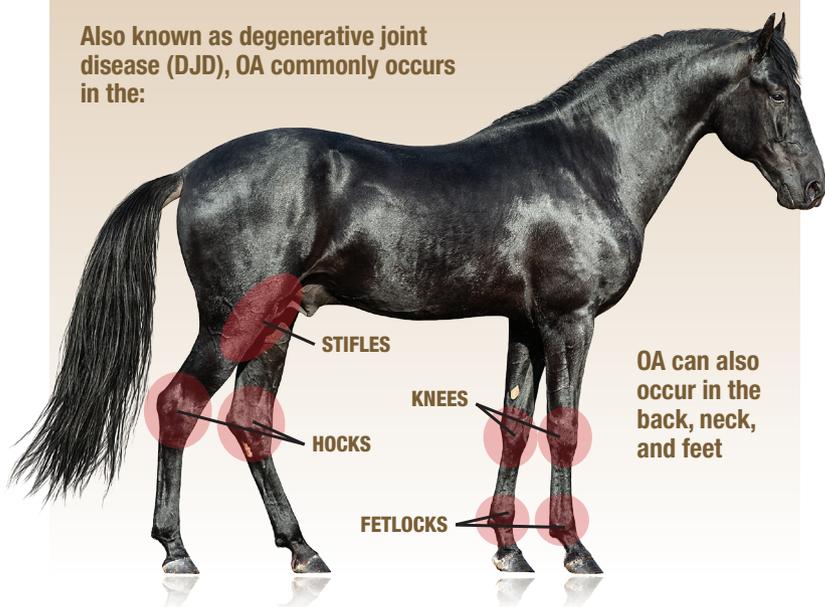
By Stacey Oke, DVM, MSc;
reviewed by Scott Anderson, DVM

Joints are areas where two or more bones meet, and most joints are mobile. Your horse's joint health is important for his performance potential and his well-being.

WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the painful inflammation of joint tissues and breakdown of the articular cartilage that lines the ends of bones within a joint. In a normal, healthy joint, this layer of cartilage reduces friction between bones, acting as a natural shock-absorber during weight-bearing.

Also known as degenerative joint disease (DJD), OA commonly occurs in the:



Affected joints become hot, painful, and swollen and have crepitus—that grating sound and feeling produced by friction between bone and cartilage. This condition has serious consequences for horses, such as:

- Limiting performance
- Shortening athletic careers
- Posing a serious welfare issue if left untreated



YOUNG



OLD

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Any horse can develop OA at any age

At-risk horses are those with a history of joint infection or trauma. Such trauma can be as mild as the repetitive concussion during weight-bearing while training and competing or as severe as a fracture, dislocation, or blunt trauma (during a fall, for example). Essentially any insult to a joint can incite the complex cascade of events that causes inflammation and cartilage breakdown.

Excessive body weight also predisposes horses to OA, just like in humans and other animal species. In humans, an extra 10 pounds of body weight adds an estimated 15-50 pounds of pressure on stifle joints, according to The Arthritis Foundation. Now imagine a horse that has one to several hundred pounds of excess body weight, which is not uncommon these days. In fact, several studies recently reported a prevalence of obesity as high as 51% in some equine populations.



60% of equine lamenesses are due to OA. It is a progressive disease and has no cure.

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ALEXANDRA BECKETT/THE HORSE STAFF

OA treatment—which focuses on keeping horses comfortable and slowing disease progression—is often multimodal and can include:

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), both intravenous and topical;
- Regenerative therapies;
- Intra-articular (injected into the joint) corticosteroids, hyaluronic acid, and/or polysulfated glycosaminoglycans; and
- Extracorporeal shock wave therapy



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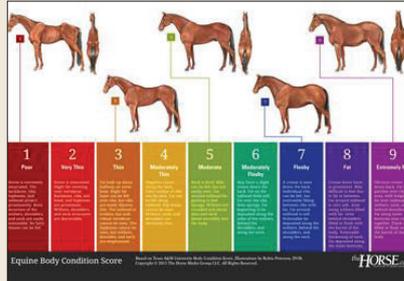
Your veterinarian will perform a lameness exam and use imaging (i.e., X rays, MRI, CT, etc.) to diagnose OA

AS AN OWNER...

...you can help maintain your horse's joint health by:

Monitoring his BCS.

Familiarize yourself with the nine-point body condition scoring chart, accurately assess your horse's BCS, and modify his diet as needed.



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Facilitating movement through plenty of turnout time and exercise on appropriate surfaces.



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Keeping your horse's feet balanced and well-trimmed or shod to reduce joint stress.



THE HORSE STAFF

Feeding oral joint health supplements. Studies support the administration of products containing:

- Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate;
- Hyaluronic acid;
- Avocado soybean unsaponifiables (ASU); and
- Omega-3 fatty acids.

Other supplements that might also benefit arthritic horses include green tea extracts, green-lipped (perna) mussel, turmeric/curcumin, lubricin, and more.

Take-Home MESSAGE

▶ Preserving your horses' joint health will optimize their athletic careers and keep them comfortable as they age.

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- proven joint health
- soft tissue support
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