

# The 5 ways to a happy horse



It takes a lot of hard work to look after horses and donkeys. They are BIG animals that need our help to stay happy and healthy! At Redwings we make sure that our 1,200 residents always have the Five Freedoms. The Five Freedoms have been created by animal welfare experts and they define the ideal states of Animal Welfare. They are:

- Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition.**
- Freedom from discomfort**
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease**
- Freedom to behave normally**
- Freedom from fear and distress**

So let's have a look at the Five Freedoms in a bit more detail...

First up **(1) Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition;** This one seems simple enough! Every part of a horse's body requires water, from its brain to its nervous system. A horse will drink 10 to 15 litres of water per day and sometimes even more in the Summer! Food is a little more tricky because the food given to the horse must be the right sort and given in the right quantities depending on its breed, health, age and the amount of exercise that it does. Food is essential for horses to provide warmth, build muscle and to fight illness.

**Horses require access to clean water at all times, without water a horse will die within two to three days.**

**(2) Freedom from discomfort;** There are many factors that might cause a horse to feel discomfort. For example, a horse may feel cold in windy weather if there is no shelter, or its rug might be too tight and rub its skin! A horse must have its needs assessed on an individual basis to ensure that it does not feel discomfort.

**The pony above is suffering from discomfort as its hooves are much too long and the pony is standing awkwardly as a result. Farriers must trim a horse's hooves every six to eight weeks to prevent this type of discomfort occurring. Long term discomfort like this will quickly start to cause pain for the horse.**

**(3) Freedom from pain, injury and disease;** We all feel unwell from time to time. If we have a cold, having a long sleep and eating well is usually enough to make us feel better and prevent our symptoms from becoming worse. The same goes for horses too. Horses that are well cared for by their owners will still feel poorly every now and then, but a responsible owner will act fast to make their horse feel better. In many cases, worming and vaccinating a horse will prevent it from becoming unwell.

**Can you see this pony is standing oddly? His legs were so sore he couldn't straighten them comfortably. Since his rescue he is much more comfortable and often enjoys a good canter round his paddock.**

**(4) Freedom to express natural behaviour;** Lots of space in a field will allow a horse to run freely and behave like a horse! Having friends is also very important to horses, they are naturally herd animals which means in the wild they live in big groups for protection. Our domestic horses don't need to protect themselves from wild predators but having a friend is still great for them as it enables them to feel happy and relaxed.

**These two young mules are play fighting with each other. This is a really important part of their learning to behave like mules. In the wild horses, donkeys and mules fight in this way to establish who is the most dominant in the herd.**

**(5) Freedom from fear and distress;** Horses can feel very anxious about new things, but in the right hands, horses can be very trusting. Trust is gained through being patient with a horse especially when it's feeling nervous. A horse cannot say to us "I'd rather not do that because ..." they can only demonstrate that they are scared of something by physically showing us. Unfortunately we often mistake this behaviour for naughtiness! Caring for a horse's mental wellbeing is very important. If you care for and understand a horse's needs, there is no reason that you shouldn't get along well with one another.

**These poor donkeys have had some bad human experiences in the past. They were very scared of humans indeed. Since their rescue, their confidence has grown dramatically and they'll even allow us to give them a cuddle from time to time!**