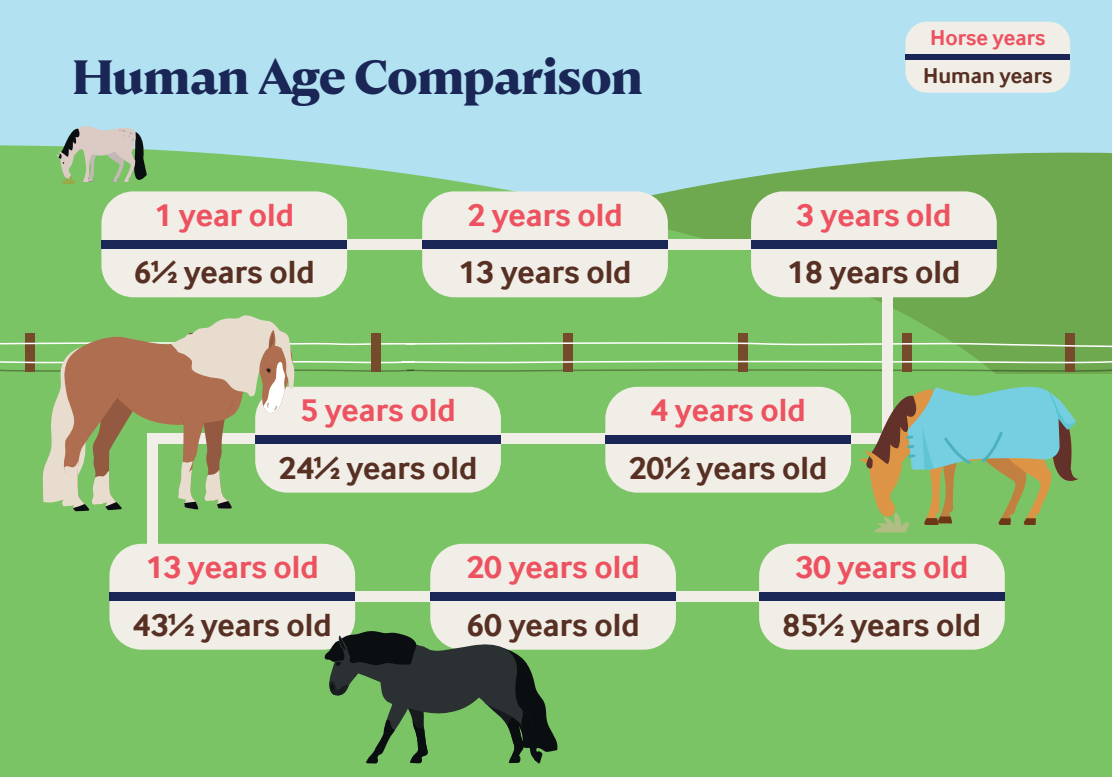


Human Age Comparison



Your Horse's Mental State

Positive

- Greets you in the same way each day
- Spends most of their day grazing or eating forage
- Interacts with other horses, for example, they can see other horses from their stable, share a field or can see other horses from their field
- Mutual grooming with other horses and regular grooming from owner
- Express themselves in the usual way
- Happy and attentive when ridden, driven or exercised
- Have a relaxed expression on their face both in the stable and when moving or ridden, driven or exercised

Negative

- Is withdrawn, dull or depressed, for example, stands in the corner of the stable with their head down
- Not interested in food
- Stays away from other horses in the field or is grumpy when groomed
- Has become generally grumpy or aggressive
- Grumpy when being tacked up or objects to being ridden, driven or exercised (this could also be physical)
- Tension around their muzzle and eyes

We're always here for support

If you have any questions or cause for concern, we are here to support you. We can provide advice on how to care for your equine and also support you in making the right welfare decisions for your individual situation, including euthanasia.

You can get in touch with our Welfare Team at any stage in your equine’s journey by calling 01427 787 369, emailing welfare@bransbyhorses.co.uk or visit BransbyHorses.co.uk.

Useful links

The British Horse Society’s information on euthanasia



The British Horse Society’s Friends At The End service



The Blue Cross’ bereavement service



Scan codes with your smart phone



Find us at LN1 2PH
01427 788 464
BransbyHorses.co.uk



Caring For An Ageing Equine

Transforming the lives of equines together



When first owning a horse or pony, it’s very exciting and you look forward to spending time with them. However as animals get older, their needs will change, so it’s a good idea to think about this and plan ahead to make sure your equine’s needs continue to be met.

Changes in your management systems will be required to adapt to the equine’s age and difficult decisions will likely need to be discussed and made. Bransby Horses can support you with these difficult decisions. Every equine ages differently, and while the signs might be obvious in some, they might be invisible in others.

Spotting the signs of ageing

Signs can include:

- Reduced immunity – they become more susceptible to infections from a minor wound or they look under the weather more regularly.
- Dull coat and poor skin quality – their coat has lost its shine and skin becomes scurvy and less tight.
- Reduced vision and hearing – they do not respond to your actions or voice in the same way.
- Teeth disorders – they are quidding more (spilling food from their mouth when eating), or they are unable to chew the forage like before. Some equines become more susceptible to choke due to lack of ability to grind with their molars.
- Hollowing or sway back – muscle wastage appears over the equine’s back and quarters causing weakness in those areas, especially if being ridden.
- Loss of strength in their muscles – resulting in a reduced ability to carry the weight of a rider.
- Joint problems – stiffness or swellings appear and the equine appears shorter striding than normal.

How you can adjust

- Your equine may need feeding more regularly, in smaller soft feeds. Their digestive system is not as efficient as they get older and they may require more visits from the dentist.
- As they won’t be receiving the same amount of nutrients from food, changes to feed may be required. This can become complicated when dealing with Laminitis, Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS) or PPID (Cushing’s) – speak to your vet if you have any concerns.
- You may need to spend more time with them to manage their ongoing needs and keep them in a good quality of life. Providing more specific care and forage on a more regular basis. Their dentition may require more checks throughout the year as their teeth deteriorate. Medication may be needed for ongoing medical issues, for example, arthritis, PPID or EMS. This may be demanding on both your time and finances.

- When the weather is bad, your equine may need an increase in feed or require changes to help them maintain enough body condition to cope. Warmth and shelter can also help with this as they may not be able to withstand harsh weather conditions in the same way they did as a youngster.
- They may suffer from stiffness in their joints, which could be a sign of arthritis. Walking out first thing in a morning may show shorter strides, difficulty eating from a hay net or reaching down to graze. Any stiffness should be checked by a vet to ensure it is not pain related.
 - An exercise plan is important to ensure that your equine is kept mobile without causing unnecessary stress:
 - Gentle exercise is beneficial to reduce stiffness; use more time to warm up and allow stretches during work and then a long cool down period to prevent injuries and muscles seizing up.
- If your equine is not in work, increase turnout as much as possible to encourage movement, keeping them warm with rugs or shelter if required.
- Consider having tack checked regularly as muscle loss may change their shape.

Putting their welfare needs first

Owning a horse means having responsibility for their health needs while in your care. A 20-year-old horse is the equivalent of a 60-year-old human (see diagram), therefore your equine’s age must be reflected in your care management plans and decision making. Research from the DEFRA code of practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids suggests that only 9 per cent of horses die of natural causes. Unfortunately this can mean making difficult decisions considering the equine’s welfare and quality of life.

When considering your equine’s welfare and quality of life, ask yourself the following questions. Does my equine:

- 1) Interact with me in the same way as before, e.g. no longer comes to greet you in the morning?
- 2) Interact with other equines in the same way as before, e.g. keeps their distance from the rest of the herd?
- 3) Look withdrawn, dull or depressed, e.g. stands in the corner of the stable with their head down?
- 4) Show behaviour that has changed significantly, e.g. has become aggressive?
- 5) Seem to enjoy life, e.g. are they showing a change in character such as signs of stress?
- 6) Eat their normal amount of hay or forage, e.g. a significant amount of hay is being left?
- 7) Show normal activity, e.g. stiff movement, reluctance to walk or reduced performance?
- 8) Have a dull, staring coat?
- 9) Carry the same weight and condition?
- 10) Have diarrhoea often, e.g. for 3 or more days? If yes, seek veterinary advice
- 11) Drink enough water or drink more than usual?
- 12) Experience discomfort or is not able to urinate, e.g. attempts to urinate but nothing happens? If yes, seek veterinary advice.
- 13) Need help to move or get up, e.g. struggles to rise from lying down?

- 14) Experience pain?
- 15) Non-weight bearing on one or more limb, e.g. cannot comfortably stand on all four limbs or is resting a front leg? If yes, seek veterinary advice
- 16) Sweat without exercise? If yes, seek advice
- 17) Blow (panting) without exercise? If yes, seek advice
- 18) Tremble or shake? If yes, seek advice

If you are concerned that several of the signs are present, you should seek veterinary advice.

Your equine’s mental health is equally important

As well as the physical signs of old age, we need to consider their mental state, ensuring they are happy, content and enjoying life.

We have included potential indications from your equine of positive and negative behaviour to help you to assess your horse’s mental state (see table).

Euthanasia

If you are considering euthanasia the options available are:

- Lethal injection – this form of euthanasia can only be administered by a veterinary surgeon. Sometimes the horse may be sedated before administering an overdose of anaesthetic drugs which causes unconsciousness before the heart stops. There may be some involuntary muscle twitching or leg movements which can be distressing for the owner.
- Free bullet – this must be carried out by a vet, knackerman, hunt kennels or slaughterman with a license to use a firearm. The bullet will euthanise the horse instantly, however there will be normal reflexes after death.

There is a financial difference between the two options, and Bransby Horses can advise you if you'd like anymore information.

In both cases you need to consider the site of euthanasia and the disposal of the body. Burials, cremations or businesses collecting fallen stock can be discussed ahead of time.

Our team can explain all of your options and be there in person to support you through this difficult time if required.

It is also worth thinking about keeping a memento of your equine friend. Shoes can be removed and saved for you, or tail hair can be made into jewellery. The Bransby Horses Welfare Team can talk this through with you.