

WELCOME TO RYERSS FARM FOR AGED EQUINES

The residents of our farm are retired equines 20 years of age or older, many with chronic health issues. We also have some younger equines (under 20) who were rescued from abusive or neglectful situations. If this is the first time you have been around “senior” horses, you may notice some differences from other horses you may be used to seeing.

SOME FACTS ABOUT SENIOR HORSES

- Despite the best of care, the physical appearance of an elderly horse may gradually change: the back may begin to sag, the belly protrude, the withers and hip bones become more prominent. The legs may change appearance as support for the internal structure of the legs weakens. The coat and facial hairs will turn gray, and the bones of the head will look more pronounced, with deeper hollows above the eyes; the lower lip may droop. These are all common signs of aging.
- Just as in very elderly humans, as a horse ages, their metabolism slows but their digestive system may not be as efficient, which means that the senior horse’s body needs to work harder to assimilate the nutrients sufficient for basic bodily functions. As a result, horses may begin to lose weight as they age, despite the fact that they may be eating a normal amount of food. In addition, because the horses at Ryerss are no longer working, they may lose muscle tone, which also will make a horse appear thinner and its bones more prominent. Ryerss provides its residents with an individualized diet, including various supplements to boost the horse’s ability to absorb and utilize necessary vitamins and nutrients.
- Some horses have swelling in the legs and/or changes in their hooves due to age and various medical conditions. Ryerss residents are regularly seen by a farrier, who trims the horses’ hooves and applies corrective shoes when necessary. Any leg/hoof conditions are promptly treated by our staff, or by a vet when required, and chronic conditions are regularly monitored. Many of our horses also receive joint supplements and NSAIDs to relieve chronic discomfort from conditions such as arthritis.
- Senior horses often have missing teeth, which may cause the lower lip to stick out or droop, and the horse may sometimes drool. Please cut apples and carrots for all the horses into small pieces to prevent choking, and to make chewing easier for horses with missing teeth. Ryerss horses have regular visits from an equine dentist. Horses’ teeth continue to grow throughout their lives, so the dentist periodically files down their teeth (a procedure called “floating”) so they wear more evenly. The dentist will extract teeth that are problematic, and treat any mouth and tooth issues.
- Some of our residents have medical conditions such as Cushing’s syndrome (a chronic disease of the pituitary gland). Cushing’s equines at Ryerss are identified in a few ways: a yellow name card on the front of their stall, yellow tag on their halters, or a yellow halter. Horses with Cushing’s may have a long, wavy coat which is difficult for them to shed, and/or a “pot belly.”

However, most Cushing's horses remain alert, bright, and interested in their surroundings. Cushing's horses should not have too much sugar in their diet, *so feed them low-sugar treats such as sugarless mints*. Ryerss treats Cushing's horses with medications to control the disease and improve their quality of life.

- You may notice growths of one kind or another on a few of our horses. These can be benign sarcoids, or melanomas or squamous cell carcinomas. Most of these tumors are slow-growing and a horse can live a fairly normal life for many years with them. All our horses are regularly monitored by a vet and treated for these conditions to the fullest extent possible for each individual case.
- Some of our rescued horses have been abused in the past and may have scars on their bodies. All horses will sometimes injure themselves in the field or get into scuffles with another horse, so you might observe cuts, scrapes and bruises of one kind or another. Ryerss treats all such injuries as soon as they are discovered.
- Although most horses sleep standing up, occasionally a horse might lie down in the field or in its stall for a nap or to bask in the warm sun. This is especially true of horses who have leg or hoof problems and sometimes like to take the weight off their feet. Horses also love to roll in the dirt and mud! However, if you see a horse lying down or rolling who doesn't seem able to get up or seems in distress, please bring it to the attention of a volunteer or staff member.
- Ryerss residents who are in good health are turned out to pasture 24/7 during the summer. These horses are monitored during herd checks several times a day and any horse who appears to be injured, ill, or losing weight is brought back to the barn for treatment.

We hope this handout answers some of your questions and gives you a better understanding of our wonderful senior and rescued residents. If at any time you have questions or concerns about any of our horses, please ask a Ryerss staff member or volunteer, who will be happy to help you or refer you to our Animal Welfare Manager.

RYERSS IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION & IS SUPPORTED ENTIRELY BY DONATIONS AND GRANTS. YOUR GENEROSITY IS GREATLY APPRECIATED.

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED YOUR VISIT. PLEASE COME BACK AGAIN!

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