



EQUINE Vital Signs



While horses and donkeys are both equines, their vital signs are not exactly the same. Here are the main differences and similarities in their basic vitals:

1) Heart Rate (Pulse)

- **Horse:** 28–44 beats per minute (bpm) in adults.
- **Donkey:** 36–52 bpm in adults.
 - Donkeys typically have a higher resting heart rate compared to horses.

2) Respiratory Rate

- **Horse:** 8–16 breaths per minute.
- **Donkey:** 12–28 breaths per minute.
 - Donkeys tend to breathe more rapidly than horses, especially at rest.

3) Body Temperature

- **Horse:** 37.5–38.5°C (99.5–101.5°F).
- **Donkey:** 36.2–37.8°C (97.1–100°F).
 - Donkeys often have a slightly lower body temperature than horses.

4) Capillary Refill Time (CRT)

- **Horse:** Less than 2 seconds.
- **Donkey:** Less than 2 seconds.
 - This is similar for both species.

5) Gut Sounds

- **Horse:** Regular and distinct gurgling sounds are expected, indicating healthy gut movement.
- **Donkey:** Donkeys tend to have quieter gut sounds compared to horses, though they should still be present.

Other Considerations

- **Donkeys** often show more subtle signs of illness or distress compared to horses, so it's important to be particularly observant of changes in behavior or condition.
- **Donkeys** are more heat-tolerant than horses and may respond differently to temperature changes or exercise.

While there are similarities, it's important to recognize these differences when assessing the health of a horse versus a donkey.

Taking vital signs for horses and donkeys is essential for monitoring their health. Here's how to assess their vitals:

1) Heart Rate (Pulse)

Horse:

- Location: You can check the pulse either under the jaw (facial artery), on the inside of the foreleg, or on the hind legs under the tail.
- Method: Use two fingers (never your thumb) to feel for the pulse. Count the beats for 15 seconds, then multiply by 4 to get beats per minute (bpm).

Donkey:

- Location: The pulse points are similar to a horse: under the jaw (facial artery) or beneath the tail at the coccygeal artery.
- Method: As with horses, count beats for 15 seconds and multiply by 4 to get the bpm.

Tip: If you're comfortable with using a stethoscope, place it on the left side behind the elbow to listen to the heart.

2) Respiratory Rate

Horse:

- Method: Watch the horse's flank or nostrils and count the number of breaths in 30 seconds, then multiply by 2.
- Normal Rate: 8–16 breaths per minute.

Donkey:

- Method: Same as for horses—watch the flank, chest, or nostrils for breaths.
- Normal Rate: 12–28 breaths per minute.

Tip: In both species, make sure the horse or donkey is calm and resting for an accurate reading. Heavy breathing could indicate stress or overheating.

3) Body Temperature

Horse and Donkey:

- Equipment: Use a digital or mercury thermometer.
- Method: Lubricate the thermometer with petroleum jelly and gently insert it into the rectum. Hold it in place for 1–2 minutes until you get a reading.
- Normal Range:
 - Horse: 37.5–38.5°C (99.5–101.5°F)
 - Donkey: 36.2–37.8°C (97.1–100°F)

4) Capillary Refill Time (CRT)

Horse and Donkey:

- Method: Lift the upper lip and press your finger on the gums until they turn white. Release, and count how long it takes for the color to return to pink.
- Normal Time: Less than 2 seconds.

Tip: Healthy gums should be pink, moist, and shiny. Pale, dry, or purple gums are a warning sign of dehydration or other issues.

4a) Mucous Membrane Color

- **Horse and Donkey:** Check the color of the gums or inner eyelids.
 - Normal: Pink and moist.
 - Abnormal: Pale, yellow, red, or purple can indicate illness or shock.

5) Gut Sounds

Horse:

- Method: Use a stethoscope or just listen by placing your ear on the horse's flank. You should hear gurgling sounds from all four quadrants (upper and lower left and right sides).

Donkey:

- Method: Similar to horses, though donkeys often have quieter gut sounds.

General Tips:

- **Calm Environment:** Ensure the horse or donkey is calm before taking vitals for more accurate results.
- **Record Regularly:** Keeping a log of vitals helps you recognize deviations from their normal range.

By regularly monitoring these vitals, you'll be able to assess the health of both horses and donkeys and catch potential problems early.