Behavior Problems: Stable Vices Overview

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stable & stall vices

Horses are natural pasture animals. Their typical activities include grazing anywhere from 12-16 hours a day, walking, and playing with other horses. Problems can arise in horses that are confined to stalls for long periods of time without access to natural activity - these are called vices.

What constitutes a vice?

A vice is a bad habit or negative activity that can happen as a result of stress, boredom, anxiety, fear, or excess energy. Stereotypical vices can easily be copied by other horses within the barn and become habits that are extremely difficult to break. Horses that are kept confined in their stalls for extended periods of time may resort to vices.

Types of vices:

- **Kicking:** Stabled horses may resort to kicking due to boredom or hunger. Horses that learn to kick can quickly learn to destroy doors and other parts of your stable. Unfortunately this is also a vice that is easily taught to other horses. Ways to curb or decrease kicking behavior are to add another mealtime, place toys in the stall, or allow the horses extra time outdoors.

- **Weaving:** Generally can be attributed to boredom but can also be a learned behavior. A horse that exhibits weaving behavior will shift its weight from side to side, moving from one front leg to the other and swaying his head and neck. Weaving can lead to weight loss, weakened tendons, and poor performance. Horses that are turned out to pasture will generally stop weaving.

- **Box walking:** Horse will continuously walk around his stable in circles due to boredom. This can cause damage to ligaments, joints as well as simply wear your horse out. To decrease this behavior offer more turnout time. If your horse must be in a stall, offer toys or try adding an additional mealtime.

- **Wood chewing:** This behavior is often based on a psychological rather than nutritional issue - usually lack of exercise or boredom. However, proper attention should be paid to ensuring a balanced and adequate diet is adhered to. Wood chewing can cause abnormal wear on teeth which in turn can cause issues with grazing. Provision of a salt block is recommended as is covering all wooden surfaces.

- **Cribbing:** Often caused by boredom, horses will set their incisors into a horizontal object, arch their neck and pull backwards, swallowing air. This causes a release of endorphins and can be very addictive. Cribbing can lead to weight loss, gastric colic, and excessive tooth wear. Spray deterrents such as Chew Stop can be used on surfaces

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your horse uses to crib as well as coverings for wooden surfaces.

- **Tail rubbing:** Often associated with parasites - horses will back up to anything and rub. Once your horse has had a bout with parasites the rubbing can become a habit. Can result in damage to skin and tail. Parasite control is essential to eliminate possible issues.

This is not a complete list by any means, but it is designed to give you an idea of some of the more stereotypical vices that horses employ when they are continuously stalled.

The key to help avoid these vices are as follows:

- Turn horses out more often to allow for more freedom and less boredom.
- Give your horse toys to keep his mind and body active.
- Offer companions like roosters, goats, or cats.
- Increase their roughage or hay content.

When tending to your horse consider that they are designed to spend their time outdoors grazing. With that in mind, try to adjust their care accordingly, and you'll have a pleasant companion for years to come.

Products To Help Alleviate Boredom:

Amazing Graze Treat Dispenser

Jolly Ball

Pas-A-Fier Toy

Jolly Snack Holder & Ball

Jolly Apple Horse Toy

Pony Pops

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