

Cut cost not care

Equine welfare charities receive a high number of calls from owners seeking to re-home their horse, pony, donkey or mule. Unfortunately charities have limited resources and have to prioritise welfare and rescue cases. However, if they are unable to take your equine in, they may be able to offer you advice and support in what the options for re-homing might be for you. In some cases, owners are seeking to re-home their ¹horse because they can no longer afford them. We have put together the following ideas to help in cases where sufficient savings can be made to enable owners to keep their horses.

Cutting costs

Owning a horse can be expensive, but it's not too late to think about reducing costs where you can, as long as this doesn't compromise your horse's health and welfare.

1. Livery / location

One of the biggest costs for many owners is livery. Review the facilities you are paying for to check you need them all. If you are paying for someone else to provide all or part of your horse's day-to-day care, it may reduce costs if you were able to do more yourself, even on a temporary basis. It could be worth looking around for a suitable grass livery or renting a field, which can be even cheaper if it is shared. Just remember that you will need to consider if this offers suitable facilities e.g. water supply, electricity, shelter, secure fencing, storage, the amount of grazing and the quality of the grass. It is important to put in place a field maintenance programme to ensure you have adequate grazing all year round. A suitable area of hard-standing is also beneficial for when pastures are wet.

2. Feeding

The vast majority of horses manage very well on a forage-based diet and a balancer if necessary. Your vet or nutritionist can advise whether your horse really needs additional feed depending on their nutritional requirements. Fortnightly weigh taping and body condition scoring (fat scoring) will help you monitor your horse's weight fluctuations and prevent obesity. Although horse weigh tapes aren't completely accurate, they do give an indication of weight and aid in monitoring. Weigh tapes aren't effective for donkeys, but you can use a heart-girth measurement instead (please contact the Donkey Sanctuary for advice).

3. Bedding

There are many bedding products on the market, so do your research and look into the best options for you and your horse. Consider rubber matting to help you get the most out of your bedding. Remember stabled horses require a deep bed to promote sleep. Regular and careful removal of wet and droppings will get the most out of your bedding and protect against ill health.

4. Horse share

To reduce costs in all areas you could look at working livery or sharing your horse with someone else. Signing an agreement and setting expectations with a sharer is important, to help make sure you are both happy. Don't agree to anything you aren't comfortable or happy with and it is advised to get your agreement checked by a qualified legal advisor.

5. Working together

If you share a yard with other people, why not club together to save money and time:

- Many feed, forage and bedding suppliers offer reduced rates if they deliver in bulk;
- Ask veterinary surgeons, farriers and other professionals if they can reduce rates for group visits;
- Save fuel by sharing transport wherever you can, or consider if it is safe and possible to walk or cycle to the yard;

¹ for the purpose of this document all horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids will be referred to as horse

- Share daily duties, e.g. one of you doing the morning visits and another doing the evenings. This will save time, money and fuel.

6. Routine preventative health care

Prevention is better than cure and having the fundamentals in place should save costs associated with preventable disease later on. Discuss worming, dental checks and feeding routines with your vet to make sure you are using the most effective and economical regimes for your horse. The British Equine Veterinary Association 'Resources for Horse Owners' may also be helpful. This includes advice on paraprofessionals such as Equine Dentists. For more information visit www.beva.org.uk.

7. Farriery

Do not delay trimming and keep to a regular foot hygiene regime, even if your horse is unshod. Discuss shoeing options for your horse with your farrier; depending on their workload or health status, you may find your horse doesn't need to have a full set of shoes. If there is not much wear on your horse's shoes your farrier may be able to refit them.

8. Resist marketing

Think carefully about what your horse really needs to keep them happy and healthy. Making sure you are not buying unnecessary supplements, rugs or equipment can mean you save some extra pennies. There is plenty of good quality second hand equipment out there too. Looking after existing equipment helps it to last longer, but making sure you spend money on needed equipment at the right time can help save you money in the long run.

False economies

Short-term savings that might affect the quality of your horse's care and welfare will cause you more problems in the long run, so don't risk compromising on the following essentials:

- Proper veterinary care: Do not be tempted to diagnose and treat conditions yourself, always seek veterinary guidance if there is a problem, many vets will be able to give basic advice over the phone. Discuss disease prevention with your vet and yard owner to ensure suitable procedures are in place;
- Vaccinations: Lapsed vaccinations leave your horse vulnerable to disease;
- Regular hoof care: Taking shoes off to save money without consulting your farrier or vet could lead to lameness and expense;
- Worming and dental checks: These essentials can be reviewed, as outlined above – but not avoided;
- Professional services: Do not use a cheaper, unqualified person to do a professional's job;
- Repairs to damaged property and equipment are vital to safeguard your horse's safety and security;
- Insurance: If you're not insured against veterinary fees you must be confident that you could pay any unexpected bill. Third party liability cover is highly advisable for all horse owners, as claims for accident or injury to people have been known to run into millions of pounds.

Be realistic

It is vital to look ahead and budget effectively to meet the needs of your horse. Remember that horse care costs in the winter increase so be prepared for this if taking a horse on in the summer. Ideally, put a little away every month or when you can, to help you manage if an unforeseen circumstance arises. Not facing up to looming difficulties can greatly reduce the options available to you once the problem has become too overwhelming to ignore. If costs are too great and you're considering re-homing, please see our 'Re-home Responsibly' information for further details.

This leaflet has been produced by the member organisations of the
National Equine Welfare Council.

For further advice, please contact the NEWC office info@newc.co.uk for details of your local NEWC member.