

Boredom Can Lead To Bad Habits  
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Abnormal behavior in horses includes such activities as weaving, crib biting, wind sucking, wood chewing and stall walking. A recent survey looked at the time that dressage, endurance and eventing horses spent in the stable and the prevalence of abnormal behaviors in these horses (PD McGreevy, NP French and CJ Nicol The prevalence of abnormal behaviors in dressage, eventing and endurance horses in relation to stabling The Veterinary Record July 1995 pg. 36).

The study found that endurance horses spent the most time out of the stable and also showed the least incidence of abnormal behavior there being a total of 19% of the 211 endurance horses in the survey. The group of 744 dressage horses showed the highest incidence of behavioral problems, with 32.5% of these horses displaying one or more types of abnormal behavior. The dressage horses in the survey spent significantly more time in the stable than either of the other groups. Eventing horses spent more time in the stable than endurance horses and less than dressage horses. Of the 796 eventing horses, 30.8% showed abnormal behavior, which was similar to the dressage group but still much higher than the endurance group.

Another survey carried out by researchers at the University of Bristol (PD McGreevy, PJ Cripps, NP French, LE Green and CJ Nicol Management factors associated with stereotypic and redirected behavior in the Thoroughbred horse Equine Veterinary Journal 1995 Vol. 27 No. 2 pg. 86) examined a number of other factors that may contribute to the incidence of abnormal behavior in racing stables.

The study showed that by offering horses relatively high amounts of roughage, there was a reduction in abnormal behavior especially if the roughage was offered at frequent intervals. Supplying horses with roughage other than hay can also reduce the risk of abnormal behavior. Feeding chaff and hay as roughage seems to be better than feeding hay alone as this better approximates the variety of food the horse would have on pasture. The design of the stable also is important; horses on straw bedding were less likely to show abnormal behavior, as were horses that had a view of other horses in the yard.

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