

How to Take Your Horse's Digital Pulse

A simple four-step method for finding your horse's pulse.

By Barb Crabbe, DVM

Step 1: Squat down on the side of your horse's left front leg, and place your index finger around the left side of the fetlock joint at its lower edge.

Step 2: Apply pressure with your finger, and strum (run your finger from side to side, as though strumming a guitar) around the fetlock joint, until you feel a cordlike bundle (consisting of vein, artery, and nerve) "snap" underneath your touch.

Step 3: Apply pressure to this bundle for 5 to 10 seconds until you feel a pulse. (Note: If you can't find a pulse, adjust the amount of pressure you're placing on the bundle. If you press too hard, you'll cut off blood flow-therefore the pulse. If you press too softly, you won't create enough resistance to feel the pulse at all. Don't get frustrated-practice!)

Step 4: Now here's the tricky part. You need to determine whether your horse's digital pulse is throbbing abnormally. It helps to know what a healthy pulse feels like-but you can't always find a pulse on a healthy leg/hoof. It might be too faint. On the other hand, you'll know he has a problem if you can easily find his digital pulse. (If you're not sure, consult your veterinarian or knowledgeable friend.)

Step 5: Repeat Steps 1 through 4 on your horse's other three legs.

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