



**EQUESTRIAN SPORTS  
NEW ZEALAND**

**Equestrian Sports New Zealand  
Competitors Guide for  
Good Horse Welfare Practice**

(Especially prepared for Defender Horse of the Year 2025)

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**Including Top Tips for each Domain**

# The Five Domains model of animal welfare assessment

The Five Domains model of animal welfare assessment has been used since 1994. It is based on "Five Domains" of an individual animal, or group of animals' welfare at any point in time.

These Domains each contribute to an animal's overall welfare and allow us to assess the Four Functional Domains, which impact an animals' welfare, as either a positive or negative influence on the animals' experience of its world in Domain 5.

One of the most important strengths of the Five Domains is that it recognises that minimising or resolving negative physical, health or mental states does not necessarily result in positive welfare but may only provide a neutral state.

To help ensure animals have a 'life worth living' they must have the opportunity to have positive experiences.

To enable this, those responsible for the care of animals need to provide them with environments that not only allow but encourage animals to express natural behaviours that they find rewarding. Management of animals requires that all negative experiences are immediately addressed; positive experiences are identified and provided for them, and barriers to positive experiences removed wherever possible.

This shift in understanding is the basis for the Five Domains model which incorporates the provision of positive welfare and recognises mental affective states. It centres on the following five categories with practical provisions:

## Nutrition

“Provide ready access to safe water and a diet adjusted to the individual to ensure and maintain optimal health and fitness.”

- A good state of hydration is essential. To stay hydrated, horses need at least 50mL of water per kg of body weight per day. A 500kg horse will therefore require at least 25L.
- Ensure your horse or pony has plenty of access to water during yarding, competition and at night. It can be a good idea to use bailing twine to tie water buckets against a post whilst horses are yarded to avoid spillage and a thirsty horse!



- Horses are designed to graze, and forages such as grass and hay should make up a large portion of their diet. Ensuring your horse has constant access to hay whilst yarded is a good idea whilst at a show to help balance time away from grazing. It can also be a good idea to spend a bit of time hand grazing as and when you can to keep your horse/pony happy.
- Because most horses and ponies in New Zealand are used to a diet predominantly of grass and hay, try to replicate this when away from home and avoid making sudden changes to your horse's diet, even though he won't be in his usual environment.
- On the days when you compete, feed your horse as per normal the evening before and after, and you may wish to add some extra salt or electrolytes to their after-work feed if they have sweated heavily.

***NUTRITION TOP TIP:  
MAKE SURE YOUR  
HORSE ALWAYS HAS  
ADEQUATE FIBRE  
AND WATER***



## Environment

“Provide suitable safe enclosures with room to move, shade, good air quality and comfortable resting areas.”

- Horses' thermoneutral zone is usually between 5°C and 25°C. The thermoneutral zone is the range of ambient temperature where horses can usually remain comfortable without effort.
- Temperatures at Hastings in March can get a bit cooler at night but still be quite warm during the day. Ensure your horse has the right weight of cover whilst yarded at the show, especially if they are not usually in the temperature range you may experience whilst at DHOY. This might include a light day sheet (in a light colour) when shade is limited.
- If you are standing outside a ring waiting to ride or need to wait for a mounted prizegiving it can be a good idea to have a light blanket over the horses' quarters to avoid them becoming cold and stiff if temperatures are low or wind chill is very cold.

***ENVIRONMENT  
TOP TIP:  
REGULARLY CHECK  
YOUR HORSE IS  
COMFORTABLE***

## Health

“To diagnose, prevent and treat disease, or injury and to create and implement good exercise conditioning and free exercise.”

- As much as we do our best to prepare for an event there can be bumps in the road.
- Be sure to look out for signs of pain or discomfort and put your horse's welfare before competition.
- Pain-related behaviours can range from subtly moving away when being groomed or not allowing you to catch them in the field to high reactivity behaviours e.g. bucking/rearing.
- If you think your horse needs vet attention reach out to the event Chief Steward or visit one of the on-site veterinarians at DHOY.



**HEALTH TOP TIP:**  
**REGULARLY CHECK**  
**YOUR HORSE OVER**  
**AND MONITOR THEM**  
**FOR DISCOMFORT**

- Horses' welfare should always be at the forefront. If you see something that you think is putting a horse or a rider's wellbeing at risk please report it to your discipline Chief Steward. ESNZ take horse welfare seriously and will step in to help or refer to the on-site vet if there is a welfare issue.

- Before you even leave your property gate, to make your journey to DHOY, ensure your horse or pony is in optimum health. Check temperature, heart rate or other

vitals if you are at all unsure and consider contacting your vet if you have any concerns at all.

## Behaviour

“Provide sufficient space, proper and safe facilities, compatible company to enable the horse to express normal behaviours.”

- Promote engagement in rewarding activities and positive interactions, enjoyable experiences, calm and confident horse.





- After competing, it's a good idea to take them for a hand walk in the evening, just to stretch out their muscles. You can repeat this again the next morning also, especially for horses being housed in yards or boxes when they usually live in a paddock.

**BEHAVIOUR TOP TIP:**  
*SPEND TIME AND  
 ENGAGE WITH YOUR  
 HORSE REGULARLY*

## Mental State

“Provide safe, compatible, and appropriate opportunities to have pleasurable experiences.”

### **MENTAL STATE**

#### **TOP TIP:**

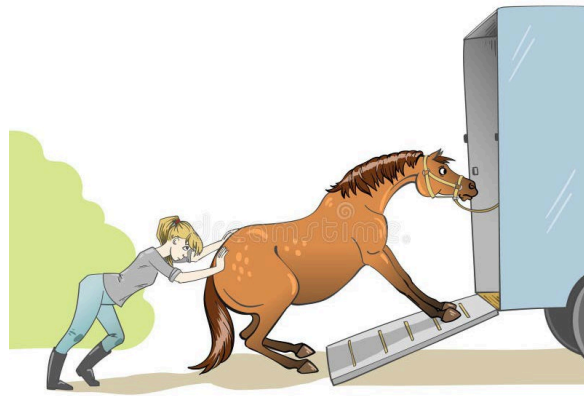
*DON'T FORGET TO  
 ALSO LEAVE THEM IN  
 PEACE AT TIMES SO  
 THEY CAN REST*

- Just like us, good quality rest and sleep is essential as it allows horses' brains and bodies time to recuperate.
- It is important to remember that horses do not sleep through the night like we do, but sleep in several short bouts throughout the day and night.
- Ideally, horses should be allowed to choose how and when they rest and sleep. It can be a good idea to allow your horse sometime during the day (and of course night) where they are left in peace to rest.
- Ensure you also minimise boredom, anxiety, fear, and loneliness. Your horse takes cues from you, your presence and calm attitude can help them to feel calm, confident, at ease and more in control. They enjoy variety and find being bonded with their human rewarding.

## Travel and Transport

No matter how far you are travelling to DHOY from, ESNZ has some guidelines when it comes to transporting your four-legged friend:

- Make sure your horse float/vehicle/truck has a current WOF or COF.
- Ensure the horse transport is reasonably comfortable and secure.
- Supply your horse/pony with proper and sufficient food and water at sufficient intervals as required.
- Rest periods must allow horses sufficient time to drink and eat, rest, relieve themselves and recover.



## Human Wellbeing

- Your health and wellbeing is important too. While away from home you'll be doing activities for longer periods of time than what you might be used to while at home.
- As well as your horse needing to be considered in a what could be a slightly different climate for them, it's equally important that you also look after yourself – pack as much warm clothing as you think you'll need as you won't have your home comforts. Make sure you bring plenty of warm and comfy bedding. Stay hydrated by making sure you drink plenty of fluids while traveling and at the event.

### **HUMAN WELLBEING**

#### **TOP TIP:**

**PACK PLENTY AND  
TAKE TIME OUT TO  
LOOK AFTER  
YOURSELF TOO!**