

MINDFUL GROOMING



Practice a simple mindfulness exercise as you groom and saddle your horse to increase your connection and focus.

MINDEFUL GROOMING



Have you ever gotten your horse ready for a ride and rushed through grooming and tacking him up, since you knew you only had a short time to ride? Were your thoughts were filled with the things that had gone wrong at work that day? Did you worry about what you were going to cook for dinner later that your kids would actually eat? Or did you think about your never ending to-do list, the laundry you need to finish up that night, or remembering that you were out of bread or milk? By the time you got your horse saddled, you probably felt frazzled and unfocused. How well did you ride? Did your horse listen well to you?

I know the feeling-I've been there! It is hard to juggle the demands of taking care of your family, with the demands of your job and career, and also have time for your horse and your horsemanship goals. So wouldn't it make sense that during our precious moments that we have to work with our horses that we would want to be present and focused and enjoy the time with our horse?

That is where mindfulness can help. In this mindfulness exercise, you will look at the process of grooming and saddling, an activity that is often done on autopilot, and instead use the opportunity to be more mindful and aware. By practicing mindfulness as you tack up you will get more grounded, more aware of your feelings and thoughts, and also practice the skill of focus. The best part is that it really doesn't take any more time to do, and the benefit is that you will be focused and ready to ride-and so will your horse!

Let's Get Gritty!

Chevy



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What is Mindfulness and how can mindfulness help my horsemanship?

Meditation teacher and author Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

The Five Core Features of Mindfulness are Observing, Describing, Participating Fully, Being Non-Judgmental, and Focusing on One Thing at a Time.

By Observing, that is noticing your experience with your horse in a direct manner, using your senses, rather than over thinking and analyzing, you will shift your thoughts to what is actually happening, so that you have a more accurate interpretation of your ride, and so that you can enjoy it more!

Describing is noticing the fine details, and being able to communicate those fine details. Through this practice you take what you have observed and describe it using all of your senses. This helps us to stay focused, and also helps to learn new skills, such as new maneuvers with our horses.

Participating Fully is staying in the moment, paying attention to what you are doing, without getting distracted.

By Being Non-Judgmental you practice self-compassion. You are gentle with yourself, you offer yourself loving kindness for your mistakes.

The last core feature is Focusing on One Thing at a Time. This takes some effort, to keep your focus on your horse, despite other distractions. You notice when your thoughts have wandered, and non-judgmentally you redirect your thoughts back to the task at hand.

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A note about starting to practice mindfulness meditation:

It is normal for your mind to wander.

When you notice that your attention has wandered from your horse and the saddling process, simply bring it back to the task at hand-saddling your horse! Don't get frustrated or chastise yourself about it-it happens!

In fact, your mind wandering is a benefit of this exercise! Every time that you notice that your mind has wandered, and you bring your thoughts back to the task at hand, you are exercising your mental focus muscles! Think of it like reps at the gym-the more you practice bringing your focus back to the task at hand, the quicker you will get at it and the easier it will be to stay focused among distractions.



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Saddling Mindfulness Meditation:

First, use your sense of sight. Take time to just look at your horse. Imagine that you've never seen your horse before-or any horse for that matter. Explore every part of your horse-the way the light reflects off his coat, the color of his mane and tail, notice any whorls or markings. Really see your horse.

Then use your sense of touch. As you brush your horse, touch your horse with your free hand. Feel the smoothness of his coat, the texture of his mane and tail. Feel his soft, velvety nose. Run your hands down his legs and feel his tendons. Use your sense of touch to be aware of your horse-this is also a great time to check for any bumps, heat, or swelling.

Next use your sense of hearing. Listen to your horse's breathing. Hear the swish of his tail as he swats at flies. Your horse's soft nickers, or perhaps whinny as your horse calls for his friends. Notice the sounds that your horse makes.

Then use your sense of smell. What aroma do you notice? Take a few deep breaths through your nose and pay attention to the fragrance.

Now saddle your horse. Pick up and feel the weight and texture of the saddle pad. Notice how your hands and arms move as you place the saddle pad on your horse's back. Feel the weight of your saddle, the scent of the leather. Observe how your arms and muscles adjust, to swing the saddle up over your horse's back, and gently set it in place. Hear the sounds of the saddle settling into place, and your horse shifting his weight underneath it. Feel the smooth, cool metal as you drop down your cinch. See the sunlight reflect off of your silver conchos. As you slide the leather latigo through your cinch ring, feel the change in texture between the materials. Listen the sounds of the leather sliding. Watch your horse's ears, his expression as you tighten the cinch. Repeat this process with putting on the bridle, using all of your senses to be aware of and truly be present in the moment.

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After your ride, come back and answer these reflection questions about the Mindful Grooming Exercise.

How did you feel as you started the mindfulness exercise?

Did your mind wander? What did it wander to?

What did you notice new about your horse during the mindfulness exercise?

How did you feel as you finished saddling your horse?

How did your ride go?