

Top 5 Myths About Blind Horses

MYTH NO. 1: A BLIND HORSE CAN'T HAVE A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE

At the Rolling Dog Ranch, every one of our 18 blind horses has a great quality of life! They enjoy grazing, rolling on the ground, sunning themselves, and grooming each other. We know of a blind horse that competes in dressage, another that teaches children how to ride, and even one that performs on a drill team. Give a blind horse a chance to live, and it will show you just how much it can enjoy life.

MYTH NO. 2: A BLIND HORSE IS DANGEROUS

The truth is that blind horses in general are very cautious and careful in their movements. They know they can't see, and they don't want to get hurt. However, a horse that is suddenly going blind may thrash about in a panic ... and it might be in pain, too. In this situation the animal should be brought into a corral or stall by itself, immediately seen by a vet, and given time to adjust to blindness. But once adapted to blindness, nearly all horses get along just fine. When a blind horse gets hurt, it's usually because another animal is bullying it. In fact, our blind horses are no more prone to injury than our sighted horses.

MYTH NO. 3: A BLIND HORSE TAKES A LOT MORE WORK TO CARE FOR THAN A SIGHTED HORSE

Other than providing a safe environment – and many of the things you'd do for a blind horse would benefit a sighted horse – there is really no more work required to care for a blind horse. Feeding, watering, grooming, trimming ... horse care is horse care. The only thing you have to do differently for a blind horse is keep it out of a herd and away from horses that will bully it. And there are some advantages to blind horses ... they don't pick gate latches and take off down the road!



Steve Smith and Alayne Marker, founders of the Rolling Dog Ranch Animal Sanctuary, with blind Lena.

MYTH NO. 4: YOU CAN'T PUT A BLIND HORSE ON PASTURE

Yes, you can. You do need to have safe fencing and inspect your pastures (see Tips No. 4 and No. 5 on reverse), and you'll need to make sure there are no other animals present who will bully it. But otherwise there's no reason your blind horse can't enjoy being on pasture. You should give it a friend of some sort ... an easy-going pasture buddy, even a goat, so it isn't alone. Our blind horses are turned out to pasture each summer and love every minute of it.

MYTH NO. 5: BLIND HORSES AREN'T "GOOD FOR ANYTHING"

Well, we know of blind horses who do extraordinary things (see response to Myth No. 1). What you can accomplish with a blind horse depends on the animal and how much time and training you invest. But if you just enjoy the company of horses, you'll enjoy a blind horse. Your blind horse will greet you with a nicker ... nuzzle you for affection ... and try to steal treats from your pocket. People who have blind horses will tell you there's something else to appreciate: You'll develop a relationship with your blind horse that is very special. The two of you will share a deeper level of trust and a more intuitive communication. This unique bond makes having a blind horse a very rewarding experience indeed.



Blind Horses: Top 5 Tips and Top 5 Myths



BlindHorses.org

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Top 5 Tips On How To Care For A Blind Horse

TIP NO. 1: GET THE BEST VETERINARY CARE POSSIBLE

If you suspect your horse is losing sight, call your vet immediately. The sooner you treat an eye problem, the better your chances of saving vision. Eye diseases can also be painful, so prompt medical care is important. Equine ophthalmology cases often are complex and sometimes difficult to diagnose; make sure you get a definitive diagnosis. It may be helpful to have a veterinary ophthalmologist examine your horse.

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TIP NO. 2: GIVE IT TIME TO ADJUST TO BLINDNESS

Going blind can be a frightening experience, especially if the loss of vision occurs suddenly. Bring your horse into a corral or stall where it can be safely confined while it adjusts to the encroaching darkness. Your horse may exhibit fearful, panicky or erratic behavior during this time, but this is a natural response to the process of losing sight. Do not assume that your horse will always be like this, because it won't. It may take days or weeks to adjust to blindness, but your horse is likely to adapt just fine. Yes, there are some high-strung horses that may not adjust to blindness, but these are rare. Most horses adapt very well to blindness and, if given a chance, can enjoy a wonderful quality of life.

TIP NO. 3: KEEP IT OUT OF THE HERD

Blind horses can't read the visual social cues of other horses. This "failure to communicate" can lead to unfortunate results for a blind horse in a herd environment. The blind horse ends up at the bottom of the pecking order, getting bullied and beaten up by others. Even if a blind horse is not getting bullied, it will try to keep up with the herd ... and that can put it at risk, too. Although there are exceptions, in general a herd is a bad place to be for a blind horse. Horses need company, of course, so give your blind horse a compatible pasture buddy for a friend.

“The two of you will share a deeper level of trust and a more intuitive communication.”

TIP NO. 4: USE SAFE FENCING

Woven-wire mesh fencing and smooth-wire fencing are good choices for blind horse pastures, as are traditional wood and pipe fencing. Barbed wire should never be used, nor should electric fencing. If a blind horse is shocked by an electric fence, it may panic, whirl around ... and go right back into the electric fence. Because they can't see what shocked them, it can be scary. For corrals and runs, we recommend lightweight metal corral panels chained to T-posts. These bend and flex if a blind horse walks into them. You may have to replace a bent panel, but you won't have to take your horse to the vet.

TIP NO. 5: INSPECT PASTURES

Pastures should be free of holes, low-hanging tree limbs, debris, jagged fencing and anything else potentially dangerous to a blind horse. You'll need to conduct "hole patrols" periodically to make sure gophers and other wildlife haven't dug new holes. If you have trees or telephone poles in your pasture, you can signal their presence by spreading gravel or rock at the base, or ringing them with sand-filled tires. You can also use inexpensive corral panels to fence off trees and poles in your pasture.



BlindHorses.org

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