

## The Best Exercise Machine

Response to Dr Phil's comment on horse ownership as exercise:

At this time of year, after the holidays, ads for weight-loss programs saturate print media and the airwaves. Even TV talk shows devote time to the battle of the bulge.

I caught part of a Dr. Phil episode in which the prominent self-help guru was evaluating the situation of one overweight guest. The woman commented that she'd like to buy a horse so she could get exercise via riding. "That's great for the horse," responded Dr. Phil drolly, "but what good is it for you?"

Clearly, the good doctor doesn't own a horse. At least, not the right horse. A quiet, well-broke, agreeable mount may indeed not offer much in the way of fitness training. But the right horse (and most of us have owned 1 or 2, haven't we?) will provide a body-building, cardiovascular- enhancing workout that would make Richard Simmons envious.

Allow me to explain...

With the right horse, you begin your fitness program by walking out to the pasture. As you stride briskly, you carry the halter and lead rope behind you, pushed up high on your back so the lead doesn't drag. The purpose of this is to tone your chest and upper-arm muscles (because you're not fooling your horse - he knows what you're carrying). As you approach to within a few feet of him, he'll walk slowly away from you then stop. This will be repeated several times in succession, until you're ready to jog. At that point, the horse will trot, then gallop around the pasture. If you're at the advanced level of fitness, you may continue chasing after him for maximum aerobic benefits. Beginners may prefer to toss the halter and lead on the ground, bend forward from the waist, and engage in heavy breathing and chanting (that's what we'll call it, anyway -- chanting) as the horse continues to circle the field. When the horse determines you've had enough of this warm-up session, he'll allow you to catch him.

Horse Exercises:

Now comes the total upper-body workout of grooming. The right horse, of course, will be caked in dried mud. The cement-like consistency of it will require work-to-exhaustion effort of your biceps and triceps.

Next comes the bending, stretching, and toning of hoof-picking. Bend over, pick up the horse's left front foot, then be prepared to jump back as he stomps it back down to the ground. (Keep your knees bent as you jump, to protect your lower back.) Reach down and pick up the foot again, hopping about with the horse to maintain your grip as you attempt to pick what seems to be dirt mixed with Super

Glue from the hoof. Eventually the horse may stand still; you may be chanting by this time. Repeat the entire circuit 3 more times, with the remaining feet.

Once you can stand erect again, it's time for the insect repellent exercise. True, with this one, your horse may actually get more of a workout than you do, but you certainly get more of the repellent. It goes like this:

Squirt!-circle- circle. Squirt!-circle- circle. Squirt!-circle- circle---  
and so on, until you're completely misted with repellent.

With the right horse, saddling up provides both aerobic and strength building benefits. The trick is to keep your feet moving as you heft the saddle blanket over and over, trying to keep it in place on a moving target. The blanket exercise warms you up for the saddle exercise, for which the routine is the same, only the weight is much greater -- perfect for buffing those hard-to-tone shoulder muscles.

Now comes the mounting exercise. With the right horse, it's left leg up, hop-hop-hop, left leg down. Left leg up, hop-hop-hop, left leg down. For balance, go around to the other side and continue the exercise (right leg up, hop-hop-hop, right leg down, etc.).

When your heart rate begins to exceed your target range, look for a bucket. Bend over, pick it up, place it upside-down next to the horse, wait for the horse to move away, then bend over, pick it up again, place it next to the horse, and so on.

When the horse deems you've had enough of these repetitions, he'll stand still and allow you to actually mount. At this point, of course, you'll be too exhausted to ride. It's best not to overdo it, so dismount, grab a protein bar, and head to the shower.

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