

Horses

Horses are symbols of speed, strength, and stamina. As we examine the anatomy of horses, we can easily see how they can live up to this image. Horses have muscular bodies and powerful legs. They have one hoofed toe on each foot. Their heads are elongated. With enough distance between their muzzles and their eyes, horses can graze and look out for danger at the same time. At a moment's notice, horses spring into action and run as fast as 43 miles per hour. Although their diet of grasses provides little nutritional value, horses seem to have a secret energy valve that supplies them with strength. All these qualities of horses did not escape the notice of our ancestors, as horses have been domesticated for thousands of years as effective farm helpers and reliable means of transport. While the invention of machines largely relieved horses from these historical roles, they are now often kept for leisure and sports.



Horses have long manes and tails. Their hairy coats come in a variety of colors and patterns. Most horses have either single-colored coats or spotted ones. But, there are exceptions. Roaming across the African grassland are three horse species with stripes. Do you know what they are? That's right! Zebras! There are three zebra species -- the Grévy's zebra, the mountain zebra, and the common (or Burchell's) zebra. All of them have eye-catching black and white stripes.

Horses live in herds, with a male horse (or a stallion) guarding a harem of female horses (or mares) and their young (or foals; male foals are colts and female foals are fillies.) A stallion frequently challenges other stallions in an attempt to take over their harems. His aggressive behavior often leads pregnant mares from the acquired harem to miscarry, so he can mate and breed his own offspring immediately. When kept on farms, some stallions are castrated to make them more mild tempered and easy to control. Castrated stallions can no longer reproduce. They are called geldings.

We often size up an animal in meters, inches, or feet. This rule, however, doesn't apply to horses. Instead of taking out a measuring tape to record how tall a horse stands, we opt to use our hands to measure the distance between the ground and the horse's withers. The withers are the high part of the horse's spine between its neck and back. The average width of a man's hand is 4 inches. Horses must be at least 14.2 hands high. Otherwise, they are called ponies. A common mistake that we often make is to confuse ponies and baby horses. Ponies are not baby horses. They are simply horses' short relatives!

Converting the horse's "hand height" into inches is a mind-juggling exercise. Mathematically speaking, 14.2 hands equals 56.8 inches. Nevertheless, the actual conversion doesn't work this way. As we set out to calculate how tall the horse is, we must take the number before the decimal point as the number of whole hands, and the number after the decimal point as inches. Hence, 14.2 hands are really 14 whole hands and 2 inches, or 58 inches! This is confusing, isn't it?

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Questions

- _____ 1. Which of the following about horses is true?
- A. Baby horses are ponies.
 - B. They can run as fast as 43 kilometers per hour.
 - C. Horses feed on grasses.
 - D. Although horses and zebras look alike, they are not related.

Name _____



Date _____

- _____ 2. Which of the following is NOT a quality that horses are known for?
- A. strength
 - B. speed
 - C. endurance
 - D. sense of smell
- _____ 3. Horses have three toes on each of their feet.
- A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 4. What is a gelding?
- A. a baby female horse
 - B. a stallion
 - C. a baby male horse
 - D. a castrated male horse
- _____ 5. We use a measurement unit called "hands" to determine how tall a horse is. The distance between the ground and the tip of the horse's right ear is recorded as the horse's height.
- A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 6. Which of the following horse species has a striped fur coat?
- A. the Przewalski's wild horse
 - B. the Arabian horse
 - C. the Burchell's zebra
 - D. the Onager
- _____ 7. What is the minimum height of a horse?
- A. 13.2 hands
 - B. 12.2 hands
 - C. 14.2 hands
 - D. 14.3 hands
- _____ 8. If the height of a horse is said to be 15.3 hands, how tall, in inches, is the horse?
- A. 63.0 inches
 - B. 62.1 inches
 - C. 60.0 inches
 - D. 61.2 inches
- _____ 9. Which of the following statements about horses is NOT correct?
- A. Mares are female horses.
 - B. Female foals are colts and male foals are fillies.
 - C. Horses' withers are the high part of their spines between their necks and backs.
 - D. Horses have been domesticated for thousands of years.