

Hick-Up!

Our horses get them, too.

By Summer Best

It was the darndest thing.

I was at a horse show in Venice, Florida, and I noticed that a big, sorrel mare belonging to one of my competitors had an amusing look on her face. Every 20 seconds or so, the mare caught her breath and made a funny, squeaky sound, then stomped her foot.

fergus hiccups

She had hiccups!

My competitor laughed and said the symptom wasn't uncommon for her mare.

"She gets them every now and then," she said. "And she always stomps her foot after each hiccup."

I was flabbergasted. I didn't know horses could have hiccups.

A few weeks later, I was standing in our barn, petting Willie, a big, 10-year-old, bay gelding. Suddenly he started making a funny burping noise, which I realized was preceded by a big gulp of air. How strange! Hiccups!

According to scientists, hiccups are sudden contractions of the diaphragm muscles used for breathing in. Just after the muscles begin to move, the glottis shuts off the windpipe, producing the characteristic "hic" sound.

Usually, the diaphragm pulls down when you inhale and pushes up when you exhale, thereby pushing air out of the lungs. But if the diaphragm is irritated, it pushes up in a jerky way that makes breath come out abnormally.

And that, my friends, is the life pattern of a hiccup.

Hiccup experts say you might get hiccups from eating too fast or too much, or you could get hiccups from an irritation in your stomach or from being nervous or excited. Horses seem to get hiccups for the same reasons.

What's the Cure?

If you have hiccups, you might drink water or hold your breath – or there's always the theory that having a friend scare you will make them go away. If your horse gets hiccups, please don't try to scare him! Just wait

patiently. Chances are, those pesky hiccups will evaporate all by themselves in a matter of minutes.

Does your horse have a funny character trait? Does he stick his tongue out constantly or shake his body with verve or have a crazy nicker? Tell us about it! Email editor@ecmagazine.net with your funny horse stories.

Summer Best is the editor of ec magazine and the director of marketing and communications for Seminole Feed in Ocala, Florida. She enjoys riding and showing horses, working in her barn, diving for Florida lobster, singing, laughing, and pretty much everything fun and exciting... except for bowling. Visit her Web site at www.summerbest.com.