



Vaccinate Yourself Against Stress

Tonia Anderson

[Back to Articles...](#)

What is stress?

Stress is the body's response to a real or perceived threat. It gets you ready to take action in order to keep you safe. Actually, if we did not feel any stress at all then we wouldn't be alive.

Some stress can be a good thing. It can motivate us to focus on a task or take action and solve a problem. In this situation, stress is manageable and even helpful.

Why would we want to vaccinate ourselves against stress?

We have already identified that we cannot get rid of all stress—and that wouldn't be in our best interest even if we had that ability. Even though we cannot eliminate stress, we can control how we respond and how we let it affect our performance.

What does stress look like?

Some people experience physical symptoms like sweating, racing heart rate, or tense muscles. Headaches and sleep disruptions are also common. Over time, stress can result in more serious health conditions like illness, high blood pressure, heart attack, or stroke.

Most of us have been taught that when we feel these symptoms of stress that it is a negative thing. That it is something to avoid; something that means we are headed towards failure.

It is time to RETRAIN YOUR BRAIN!

How do you retrain your brain?

From our childhood, we are trained to see the negative. In school, our mistakes are highlighted and seen as undesirable. When we watch the news, it is mainly about the negative events in the world—rarely the positive.

Retraining your brain starts with your self-talk. Setting yourself up for success in the ring takes involves creating new habits:

1. Positive self-feedback daily
A ratio of 6 positive to 1 constructive feedback for best performance. People who are happy/positive perform better by 25% or more.
2. Identify your strengths
What are you good at? These strengths give you a strong foundation to rely on during times of stress.



Vaccinate Yourself Against Stress

Tonia Anderson

[Back to Articles...](#)

My talent is:

How is this strength a benefit to myself and my horse?

My talent is:

How is this strength a benefit to myself and my horse?

My talent is:

How is this strength a benefit to myself and horse?

3. Believe You Can!

All champions have one thing in common—they believed they could.



Vaccinate Yourself Against Stress

Tonia Anderson

[Back to Articles...](#)

Expectations create brain patterns that are just as real as the experience of real life events. This means our beliefs can actually change our results. Instead of the saying “I’ll believe it when I see it”, Deepak Chopra says “You will see it when you believe it”.

Create your own belief statement related to something that is currently causing you performance stress:

4. Use your flight-or-fight system to your advantage
Instead of seeing the physical symptoms of stress as a negative, tell your brain, “This is how I feel when I perform my best”.
Then you will feel a sense of comfort when you start to feel anxious instead of alarm and fear.
5. Look at other areas of your life
Negativity from one area of your life can flow into riding.
6. Have failure parties
See your mistakes as just part of the process—as one step closer to success. Failures are an opportunity for growth.
7. Find your power in power statements
Think of a brief statement that you can say to yourself to get you back on track, move forward, and increase confidence.

8. Focus on one small goal at a time



Vaccinate Yourself Against Stress

Tonia Anderson

[Back to Articles...](#)

Small successes add up to major achievements and increase our confidence along the way. Focus on the things under your control.

9. Create your success show plan
Under what conditions do you perform at your best? How much time do you need before your class? What routines help you feel relaxed and confident? What routines help your horse perform best? How much sleep do you need? Watch the people around you—you can pick up nervousness from others.
10. Be intentional about the energy you bring
Make a conscious decision about what energy you want to bring to your barn and your horse. What energy do you need to have to perform at your best? What energy does your horse need you to have to perform best? Power poses, deep breathing, and positive thoughts actually lower cortisol—a stress hormone.
11. Remember your champion moments
Think about times in the past when you went through similar circumstances and had success.
12. Visualize the rider you want to be
What would performing at your best look like? Feel like? Sound like? Use all your senses. What would your horse look like? Feel like? Sound like?



Vaccinate Yourself Against Stress

Tonia Anderson

[Back to Articles...](#)
