



Most horses sleep between 10pm and 6am

## WHAT RESEARCHERS ALREADY KNOW ABOUT EQUINE SIESTAS

We know that horses tend to sleep for between three to five hours in a 24-hour period.

They can achieve non rapid eye movement (non REM) sleep when lying down or standing up.

On average about an hour of total sleep time is spent lying down.

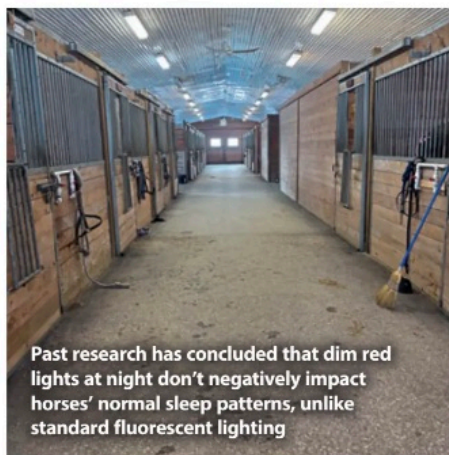
"This is an important part of REM because a degree of muscle atonia occurs during REM sleep, such that if the horse was standing he would wobble or fall over," explains Linda Greening. "In fact, research suggests that horses who display wobbly behaviour or fall over don't lie down at all. These horses are managing to achieve seconds or minutes of REM in a standing position, but it's less than ideal due to the risk of injury."

According to research, some of the factors influencing how well a horse sleeps are known to include...

- The floor space available.
- The bedding depth.
- The use of artificial lights.
- Familiarity with the environment.
- Having some form of social interaction.
- Pain.
- Core body temperature.
- Exercise.

Linda points out that while most sleep occurs between 10pm and 6am, we shouldn't assume that our horses are asleep for that entire time.

"It's important to ensure that the environment within the stable provides our horses with the resources to enable other biologically important behaviour, too; for example, forage," she says.



Past research has concluded that dim red lights at night don't negatively impact horses' normal sleep patterns, unlike standard fluorescent lighting

### Let there be light?

One aspect of a horse's environment that many owners may not consider is the lighting. Hartpury collaborated with the Royal Agricultural University and University College Dublin on a study that compared red lights with standard fluorescent lighting.

"We concluded that dim red light at night doesn't negatively impact levels of arousal, normal sleep patterns, or circadian rhythmicity, and we

recommend its use to avoid negative impacts of turning on lights at night," says Linda, who is currently inviting horse owners to take part in a questionnaire about lighting on yards to better understand this issue (right).

By engaging owners with Hartpury's scientific research Linda hopes to ensure that horses' sleep is given more thought. She points out that just because we don't see our horses sleeping that often, it doesn't mean that they don't need to.

"Horses are fascinating. As a prey species they have adapted to sleep for a relatively small proportion of the day. Just because they sleep less, though, doesn't mean that sleep isn't important to them. Sleep facilitates so many things that the body can't do while the individual is awake, including memory consolidation and tissue repair/growth, so it's important to all animals who engage in it."

**Dr Linda Greening at Hartpury University is seeking the help of *Your Horse* readers for a research project. She is keen to hear from horse owners who are happy to measure...**

- 1 The light in their horse's stable during the day and night with/without lights on.
- 2 The noise level in their horse's stable.

Both measurements can be taken with easy-to-use apps available from both Google and the Apple Store.

There is also a questionnaire entitled 'Shedding light on stable lighting practices in the UK' that Linda is keen for readers to fill in. The closing date is June 2026. Visit <https://forms.office.com/e/VrF67QHbzK>