

# The Resilient Horse: Understanding Stress in Horses

## A Two-Day Course for Horse Owners & Professionals

### Introduction

We all want our horses to enjoy the best possible quality of life. It's easy to view stress and pain as threat to that goal – and to try to avoid them wherever possible. But the truth is that challenges and discomfort are inevitable parts of life, for horses just as much as for humans.



So how do we navigate this reality? How can we optimize our horse's resiliency and prevent chronic stress? How do horses learn to cope with the challenges it faces living in our human world?

The answer lies not in avoiding stress or challenges altogether, but in understanding it – to recognize the difference between functional and harmful stress, to prevent chronic stress as much as possible and to learn what our horses need to regulate, adapt and thrive. That's exactly what this course is about.

### Context

Thirza Hendriks (Functional Horse Training) and Lee-Anne Shepherd (Anamir Equine) have a longstanding relationship. When together, evenings are filled good fun, laughter and meaningful discussions on anything horses.

Late 2024, the topic of stress was discussed during one of those evenings. Thirza mentioned that upon dissection, a lot of horses showed signs of chronic stress that manifested throughout the body. But how can you measure and quantify the effects of stress postmortem? Via histopathological investigation of biomarkers of various tissues and fluids – some which are taken just before euthanasia as well as the exclusion of other causes in combination with the behaviour of the horse during life.

For example, endocrine glands, metabolic markers, oxidative stress markers, inflammation markers, glial activity, lymph nodes etc.

Chronic stress goes together with metabolic changes, inflammation markers and neuro-

endocrine changes \ alterations.

It was this open conversation that led to the development of this course.

### Course Overview

This 2-day course is designed for **dedicated horse owners and professionals** who want to deepen their understanding of equine stress from a scientific and practical perspective.

This course contains a mix of in-depth theory, practical sessions and interactive discussions. We'll explore:

- The definitions and various types of stress
- Energy budgeting of the body
- The neurophysiology and endocrinology of stress
- The difference between acute (functional) and chronic (dysfunctional) stress
- The concepts of homeostasis and allostatic load
- Stress assessment and measurement
- Metabolic effects, dynamics and the gut-brain axis
- Chronic stress and inflammation (metabolic load)
- Tools and strategies to support your horse's resilience so they can adapt to the environment, regulate and navigate challenges.



### Afternoon practical:

Each afternoon includes a practical session **where horses will be gently exposed to challenging, but controlled situations and explore / discuss various options** to modulate the stress response and help a horse to flourish in a human world.

You'll learn to:

- Identify behaviour and body language
- Explore different ways to modulate the stress response
- Nurture resiliency and confidence

By the end of these this course, you'll have:

- ✓ A deeper, science-based understanding of equine stress
- ✓ Tools to assess and respond to stress in your horse

## Venue & Course Schedule

This course will take place on:

**November 10-11 2025**

Anamir Equine  
The Forest Road 205  
Bywong, Australia


For questions, please email host Lee-Anne Shephard at: [lenafern@yahoo.com.au](mailto:lenafern@yahoo.com.au)




Daily timetable:

- 🕒 09.00-10.30 Theory session
- 🕒 10.30-11.00 Coffee break
- 11.00 – 13.00 Theory session
- 🍷 13.00- 14.00 Lunch break
- 🕒 14.00 – 15.30 Practical sessions
- 15.45 – 16.45 Theory / Discussion

### Meals

 Coffee/tea will be available.

 Please bring your own lunches.

## Horses & Case Studies

Horses for the practical sessions will be kindly provided by host Lee-Anne Shepherd.

Participants are welcome to submit a short case study (maximum 7-minute video) for group discussion. What does this entail?

You can film any behaviour or movement pattern that you want to discuss or ask questions on within the context of stress. There are no specific rules, if you have permission to film and submit the horse for group discussion.

*Note: the case studies opportunity is provided for discussion, not for veterinary diagnosis.*

Filming guidelines will be emailed four weeks prior to the course start.

### About your teacher



**Thirza Hendriks (MSc, Pg. Dip.)** is a scientist, educator, and training coach specializing in Equine Movement Science. With a strong foundation in anatomy, movement science, neurology and exercise physiology, she is dedicated to advancing evidence-based, horse-centred practices in management and training.

Since 2018, Thirza has been a member of the ***Equinestudies Dissection Team***, conducting around 10 full-horse dissections annually across the globe—including primitive breeds and zebras for comparative anatomical research. Each case includes thorough hands-on assessments and complete medical histories, which provides a unique opportunity to map movement patterns and link them to dissection findings.

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It is Thirza's passion to translate knowledge of the horse inside out into practical management and training considerations so horse owners and professionals can make better informed decisions to optimize the horse's quality of life and performance.

During the dissections and comparative research, Thirza experienced first-hand the effects of chronic stress on the horse's body. Combined with her academic knowledge on equine neuroscience and collaboration with metabolic and endocrinology experts all over the world, Thirza has developed extensive education materials around the topic of stress – that she is happy to present all over the world.

Furthermore, Thirza collaborates closely with international pathologists to explore complex systemic diseases—such as autoimmune conditions—and to improve diagnostic approaches.



In the area of training, Thirza holds qualifications in exercise physiology (Pg dip) and studied at various (classical) training institutions. She has also successfully competed in the past (carriage driving, jumping & dressage).

Her integrated knowledge has led her to develop a unique approach to **Functional Training**—aimed at helping horses move and perform efficiently with minimal effort. While Thirza is widely recognized for her successes in rehabilitation, her true passion lies in **prevention**: Educating both professionals and horse owners to allow them to make informed decisions regarding breeding, selecting form to function and functional training to set a new improved standard within the industry so that not rehabilitation, but instead functional and fluid movement becomes the norm for (performance) horses

Today, Thirza is a much sought-after international clinician and lecturer in the field of Anatomy, Physiology, Movement Science, as well as Exercise Physiology and Functional Training for horses.



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🌐 By now, she travels to Italy, Sweden, USA, Taiwan, South Africa and Australia on a yearly basis, working together with other highly valued and renowned veterinarians, body workers, saddle fitters, and trimmers.



Together with Equinestudies, Thirza is a main driving force behind international research centres including Gilvarry Equine Medical Centre in Cape Town, South Africa.

🔗 More information about Thirza can be found on: [www.thirzahendriks.com](http://www.thirzahendriks.com)

### 💰 Investment

€ 350 per person (roughly 625 AUD)

### Cancellation policy

- A 30% refund will be given upon cancellation of the participant up till 12 weeks prior the event.
- Any cancellation on behalf of the participant within 12 weeks prior to the event will not be refunded. However, if the participant can find a suitable replacement for taking over the spot the fee can be refunded.
- Upon the unlikely cancellation of the event by the organizer, a full refund of the participation fee will be given within 14 days. Additional costs like flight tickets / overnight stay will not be refunded.

🛡️ You are strongly advised to close on a cancellation insurance

