

# RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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## Leading Horses Safely<sup>1</sup>

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Always lead from the horse's left shoulder with your right hand about 15 inches away from the head of the horse and with your left hand holding the lead neatly coiled or folded. Don't let the lead drag on the ground where it can be stepped on. Holding the lead in this manner allows you to quickly release your right hand and keep you on the ground, while preventing the left hand from getting tangled, and still maintaining control if the horse suddenly rears. Never wrap the lead strap around your fingers, hand, wrist, or any part of your body. A knot at the end of the lead can help you keep a grip on the lead if the horse pulls back.

Walk with the horse, at its shoulder, not ahead or behind. Slightly extend your right elbow towards the horse so that if making contact with you, its shoulder will strike your elbow and move you away but not knock you over. If necessary, the elbow can be used on the horse's neck to keep its head and neck straight for more control, as well as prevention from crowding. Always turn a horse to the right and walk around it. One exerts more control when turning the horse clockwise and pressing against it.

The horse that refuses to move or starts to pull back while being led, can be made to move by sharply turning the horse to one side or the other and pulling forward. This throws the horse off balance and it will take a step to regain its balance.

When leading, always prepare yourself for sudden movements from the horse by noticing the horse's

reaction to the environment. If the horse is frightened and attempts to run, turn it in a circle and tighten the circle until it stops. If a horse is scared by a new element in its environment, do not punish it. Give the horse time to investigate and become familiar with the obstacle, then lead the horse by it. Don't look directly at the horse because a horse becomes unsure of your intentions when you turn and face it.

When leading through narrow openings, step through first and let the horse follow. Be sure the horse is calm and straight as it goes through to prevent it from bolting past you. In the case of a horse trying to pass you; turn to face the horse's shoulder while continuing to stand at its side. Push against the horse's shoulder with your weight while continuing to restrain it with the halter and lead shank.

When leading into a box stall or pasture, turn the horse so it faces the direction from which it came and make it stand facing you as the lead is released or the halter or bridle is removed. Do not let it bolt away from you until you are ready for it to go.

It is up to the judgment of the horse owner, but it is recommended that one should not run a horse into a pasture with a halter on. The halter can become tangled in objects as well as the horse itself, and if the halter is strong enough the horse can strangle itself. However, with a hard-to-catch horse or in an emergency situation, a haltered horse is easier to catch. Breakaway halters should be used if a halter must be left on. Always

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unsnap the lead rope before removing the halter. This will prevent the horse from pulling back and becoming a halter puller.

Remember, horses are stronger than you are, so don't try and out pull them. If a horse acts up while you are leading it, a quick snap down on the lead will usually get its attention.

When moving horses a short distance or just out of your way, hold the underside of the noseband, not the cheekpiece or the throatlatch. The nosepiece gives you more control over the horse, as well as keeping the halter properly positioned on the horses head.

While halters and lead ropes are important and useful for leading, they are also necessary for safely *tying horses* to solid objects.