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Stress reactivity and coping in horse adaptation to environment

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Abstract

‘Coping’ or ‘coping strategy’, defined as the behavioral and physiological efforts of animal to master the situation, is more and more in interest of researchers dealing with applied animal behavior and welfare. Knowledge about ‘coping styles’ may be helpful in understanding individual adaptive capacity to stressful events. At least two types of animal coping strategy (or coping style) can be involved: (1) active copers (proactive) and (2) passive copers (reactive). The individual differences in stress response to threatening situations have been found in horses and these animals can show specific coping strategies like other species. This paper reviews the set of behavioral, psychoneuroendocrine and psychoneuroimmune mechanisms involved in animal adaptation to environmental challenges and discusses the relationship between behavioral and physiological factors involved in stress response of the horse. Exploring coping strategies in horses as well as in any captive animal can be successful when a multidimensional approach including behavioral, neural, hormonal and hematological measures is considered. Knowledge on stress coping styles can provide valuable information to predict the behavior of individuals during response to specific challenging situations. Moreover, assessing individual differences in adaptation

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