

Key Concepts:

- NEVER PRACTICE THIS RESTRAINT TECHNIQUE ON OVC TEACHING HORSES!
- This form of restraint may lead to a horse becoming “head shy”; proper technique may reduce this risk but does not completely eliminate it.

Background Information:

Grasping the horse’s ear is a common form of restraint in certain horse industry sectors; in particular, an ear twitch is quite commonly utilized on Thoroughbred racehorses. This form of restraint may lead to a horse becoming “head shy” (very difficult to work with around their head), and therefore it is not a preferred method of restraint. It is not associated with an endorphin release.

This technique is being introduced in Clinical Medicine I so that you are aware of it and will be knowledgeable about it should you work in the racing industry in future years.

However, this technique of restraint is NOT PERMITTED when working with our OVC Teaching Horses. As well, it should not be performed on any client-owned horse in the Veterinary Teaching Hospital without first obtaining consent from the senior clinician on the case.

As well, it is advisable to always seek permission from the owner before using an ear twitch on their horse.

Application of an Ear Twitch: (video script)

To apply an ear twitch, stand beside the horse and face its head. Hold the horse’s halter firmly with the hand closest to the nose. Using the other hand, run your hand up along the neck until you reach the base of the ear. Firmly grasp the ear at the base and hold tightly. **When using this form of restraint, only a hand may be used. No other items (such as the lip twitch) may be placed on the horse’s ear.**

Troubleshooting: By starting with your hand on the neck and running it forward up to the base of the ear, you minimize the surprise of touching the horse’s ear (theoretically reducing the risk of causing “head shy” behavior in the future).

Troubleshooting: Bracing your forearm against the horse’s head minimizes the risk that you will be struck by the horse if it shakes its head vigorously during placement of the ear twitch.