



## FLOWERDALE ESTATE ALPACAS

### Health & Husbandry

#### Who Has Worry Wrinkles Besides Me?

The term stress or "worry wrinkle" is used to describe the wrinkle of skin that occurs beneath the eye when an alpaca or llama tenses their facial muscles. Normally it is formed around ½ to one inch below the lower eyelid. Occasionally, an alpaca or llama will show wrinkles well below the eye. Tensing of the facial muscles can range from slightly noticeable to the extreme of actually pulling down the lower rim of the eyelid exposing the red area of membrane beneath the eye.

Caused by the tensing and tightening of the facial muscles, this skin wrinkle by definition indicates "a state of mental, emotional or nervous strain". As a behavioural indicator, it is important to note the context in which it occurs. The mere presence of a human can cause some alpacas and llamas to exhibit stress wrinkles.



This llama displays a distinct wrinkle just beneath her lower eyelid. The tension held in her face can also be seen around her mouth and lower lip. She has tightened the facial muscles creating a wrinkle below the eye and an almost "sucked in" appearance of the skin along her lower jaw area, which pulls back her lower lip. In this instance, her nostrils are also flared indicating more rapid breathing.



Not all alpacas and llamas display a stress wrinkle directly below their eye. Though this llama has a slight ripple of the skin just below her eye, her predominant skin wrinkle manifested by the tightening of her facial muscles appears further down on her cheek area.



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This llama shows a good deal of tension in her face. She has a distinct wrinkle below her eye. The more severe tightening of her facial muscles has drastically pulled her lower lip back. An additional cue that something may not be going well for this gal is the look of her eye. It is dull, rather unfocused and half closed.



Some alpacas can challenge our ability to notice skin wrinkles as a result of facial tension due to an abundance of fiber about the face. In this instance it is important to notice other possible indicators of stress. We can notice possible tension in this alpaca by her flared nostrils. A tensing in her facial muscles has tightened and pulled back her lower lip.



This alpaca does not have such an abundance of facial fibre. Along with the same indicators exhibited in the alpaca above, it is much easier to notice the wrinkle created under her eye.



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This llama displays nearly all of the cues about the head for serious stress or strain. He has severely tightened his facial muscles actually pulling the lower lid away from the eye. This tightening has pulled his lower lip back enough that his mouth is now partially opened.

His nostrils are very flared indicating rapid breathing. His eye seems distant. He is off balance leaning against a tree trunk. Additionally, though it is somewhat difficult to note in the photo, he is drooling.

This condition is serious. If you are training, end the session immediately. If you are travelling or at a show or fair, do what you can immediately do to remedy or at least significantly mitigate the circumstances. If you would see this stance out in your field, know there is a problem of some sort. Immediately consider the surroundings and call your veterinarian. With each and every situation, it is important to consider the "look" you feel expressed in their eyes. Review the photos of each of these animals paying deliberate attention to their eye expression. What additional information comes to you about their personalities or their interest in what is going on around them? Is it possible to consider that their expressed tension and concern might seem more from an outside stimulus as opposed to within them - a reaction to their surroundings as opposed to illness? Perhaps it is both.

Consider the possible stories for each of these animals and what course of action you might chose to best assist in a mitigation or remedy. Would you take their temperature or take them for a walk? Would you stop what you are doing with them or perhaps do something differently? Would you call your veterinarian? Is the level of stress appropriate for the surroundings and personality of a particular animal at this given time? Could it be something more? Learning what might be expressed through the eyes of each of your alpacas and llamas will be a valuable aide in determining how they may be feeling. As with people, though we may individually express a bit differently, our eyes and faces can tell quite a story.



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