

# So you want to be an Equine Tech?



The reality of being an equine technician in a busy referral practice is that it's not a job for everyone. When people hear what I do for work, they say "that's amazing", "how incredible", "it's like a dream job". And for me it is a dream job, but it definitely is not for everyone. Every job comes with a reality check and finding the right job for you may take some trial and error.

**Reality #1: I love horses so it's the right job for me.** You are going to see animals in pain and suffering, you are there to help them but that doesn't make it easier to see and owners can make decisions you don't agree with.

**Reality #2: Most equine jobs require some evenings and weekends and on call.** In fact many entry level positions start on weekends or overnights. As a young person with many aspirations, this reality can quickly disappoint you when you realize that you can't go to a horse show with your friends on the weekend and that you may miss some family events. At the same time shift schedules are a great way to balance child care at home or continuing to work on your education.

**Reality # 3: It's hard work.** Caseloads can vary randomly and seasonally. You will have shifts where you are lucky if you have time to eat or go to the bathroom. As much as one clinic can staff appropriately, people can still call in sick, have vacation or regardless of being fully staffed, the patient load can still be overwhelming and exhausting. On a busy day I can easily walk 18000 steps or over 6 miles.... or more.

# 5 Tips to Get you There

Ok, so after all of these warning you still want to be an equine technician? Personally I can tell you that it's the single most rewarding job I have ever had! And the other people that do this work make amazing coworkers. With that in mind, here are a few tips that I give to any student that tells me they want to do what I do.

- 1. Choose a good school.** Most Vet tech programs are 2 year associate degrees. Look for a program accredited by AVMA and has a strong large animal program. The AVMA has a list of all accredited Veterinary technician schools. <https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Education/Accreditation/Programs/Pages/vettech-programs-all-programs-list.aspx>
- 2. Volunteer with equine vets when you can.** It's great experience. It creates great connections and can give you an idea of what the job really entails. Many vet tech schools require some sort of shadow time anyways but the more you do, the more you will benefit.
- 3. Get a great internship/externship!** When you are close to finishing school, where ever that may be, you will likely have to do a vet tech internship. Make the most of that time. Go to the best equine hospital you can get to. It's hard for most students to manage time away from a job or family to travel but it will be worth it. And many places have resources for student accommodations.
- 4. After graduating from an accredited VT school you should be eligible to take the Veterinary Technician national exam (VTNE)** to become registered, certified or licensed in your state. Not all States or Veterinarians require techs to be certified but any job with good pay and/or benefits likely will. If nothing else, it will give you an advantage over other candidates.
- 5. Consider the online ACT program.** Not all AVMA accredited schools are created equal, if there is once place that some of them lack, it's in large animal courses. The ACT program provides extra equine vet tech related learning skills and would look good on a resume to equine employers as well as providing you with important knowledge. This program is also great for equine hospital support staff, not just techs. <http://equine.4act.com/>

With those 5 keys in your tool box, you will be ready for an incredible job and rewarding career to start! Equine referral practices or clinics are more likely to invest in a trained and educated technician, it just depends what you would like to be doing. A rural practice job can be just as rewarding if you like people, animals and hard work.



There can also be an advantage to doing a bachelor degree right off the bat. It's a long term investment and will provide you with more possibilities throughout your career. It may not make a difference initially after school but if you want to stay in the field long term, possibilities include expanding into vet tech teaching or practice management. All of that can seem far from what you

want right now but after many many years of wrestling animals, there may come a time in your life you want to slow down a bit and have a less hazardous job. One of the challenges later on can be that most vet tech school credits do not transfer easily to other colleges and universities. Beware though that a four year animal science program does not automatically make you eligible to take the VTNE, only if you graduate from an accredited college.

Want more? To become a Veterinary Technician Specialist Equine Veterinary Nurse (VTS-EVN), you then have to spend about 3 or more years on the job gaining experience before beginning a yearlong application process for writing case logs and writing an exam to prove your knowledge. The Academy of Equine Veterinary Nursing Technicians awards this special recognition that can give acknowledgement of your skill level and give you a competitive advantage in the work place.

