

Equine Health Tips



Gastro-Intestinal Ulceration in Horses – natural care to assist in management

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Commonly we hear about horses with gastric ulceration, and often it is thought that horses that are kept in stables and fed twice per day are most at risk. However in recent times we have had many clients present at the clinic with diagnosis of gastric ulceration – these horses are generally pleasure horses that live basically at pasture and are fed simple diets. So why do they develop gastric ulceration, how can we reduce the onset, and if present how to relieve symptoms and assist in recovery.










What is a gastro-intestinal ulceration?

Gastro-intestinal ulceration is the formation of ulcers in the lining of the stomach and or the small intestine. These can be mild or deep enough to cause bleeding and in the worst case can result in perforation of the stomach or small intestine.

Causes of Gastric Ulceration:

-  Stress – related to housing, handling or feeding practices
-  Anti-inflammatory drugs – non steroidal eg Phenylbutazone
-  Feeding of excess grain
-  Irregular feeding times

Signs of Gastric Ulceration:

-  Teeth grinding
-  Lack of weight gain
-  Slow ingestion of feed
-  Rests during eating
-  Drinking water during or immediately after food
-  Dull coat
-  Attitudinal changes
-  Abdominal discomfort
-  Loose faeces

Diagnosis:

- 🐾 Endoscopy to view the lower oesophagus and, stomach
- 🐾 Barium contrast and x-ray
- 🐾 Test faeces for blood, usually only useful in foals rather than horses.
- 🐾 Blood tests can be of assistance but do not confirm the presence of an ulcer, as they are not specific to which tissue is producing the changes that may be seen in the results.

Treatment/Management:

Veterinary management includes the administration of drugs such as cimetidine and antacids to change the acidity of the gastric region and hence reduce the risk of further development and damage.

Feeding products like Equisure to reduce the acidity of the hind gut.

Natural Management includes:

- 🐾 Diet assessment – feed small feeds often and allow the horse access to pasture for as much of the day as possible
- 🐾 Ensure meals are given at the same time every day
- 🐾 Avoid feeding grains and other acid building feeds
- 🐾 Feed a small amount of lucerne prior to work
- 🐾 Add plenty of water to any bucket feed offered
- 🐾 Ensure the herd is settled and rearrange as required to reduce stress levels
- 🐾 If horse stabled, ensure they have access to hay 24 hours/day to mimic grazing behaviour.
- 🐾 Administration of herbs & tissue Salts

Eg: Slippery elm – to create a protective barrier to the lining of the digestive system
 Meadowsweet – antacid
 Plantain or marshmallow – mucilage to protect and soothe
 Rosehips – flavonoids to assist healing
 Nat Sulph – reduce acidity

These simple measures can assist your horse in recovering from this condition and maintaining digestive health to reduce the risk of recurrence.

Until next time take care of yourselves and your equine friends. **Christine**