

Equine Gastric Ulcer

Factsheet

What are Equine Gastric Ulcers?

As horses have evolved to graze almost constantly, stomach acid is continually produced.

Gastric ulcers develop as a result of excess acid corroding the delicate stomach lining and can range from small open sores to more serious lesions. If a horse goes a prolonged period of time without eating, an ulcer can quickly develop due to the level of stomach acid outweighing the amount of protective and neutralising substances in and lining the stomach. In extreme cases, the ulcer can penetrate the stomach wall which leads to bleeding. Equally, if a horse fed the wrong diet (ie. Starchy concentrates fed in bulky amounts with large intervals), being exercised intensively, is generally stressed or stabled for long periods of time then your horse may also be at risk from stomach ulcers.

Ulcers can develop gradually (normally in the lower portion of the stomach – glandular) but can develop in a little as 48 hours in the upper portion of the stomach (squamous) if your horse is deprived of food.

How do I know if my horse has a gastric ulcer?

Unfortunately, many horses won't show clinical signs but there are a few things to keep an eye out for:

- Colic like symptoms or regular bouts of colic
- Weight loss/loss of condition
- Crib-biting
- Poor performance/reluctance
- Lack of energy/stamina
- Girthy/grumpy behaviour

Did you know...

Horses turned out 24 hours a day with constant access to forage are thought to be six times less likely than over-worked, regularly stabled horses to develop ulcers.

Did you know...

Approximately 90% of race horses will develop a gastric ulcer at some point in their lives, with half of them displaying no symptoms at all. Other competition horses are also more prone than everyday riding horses, with a 40-60% prevalence in this group.



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How can I prevent Equine Gastric Ulcers?

Acid in the stomach quickly accumulates if it's not neutralised by the saliva created when a horse chews. Therefore it's especially important to encourage the natural behaviour of your horse when it comes to grazing in order to help offset the problems caused by excess stomach acid.

There are a number of things you can do to try and avoid the development of gastric ulcers.

- High fibre/high oil/low starch diet feeding little and often. If concentrates must be fed, they should be split into small meals fed at regular intervals throughout the day
- Allow free access to grass or hay. 24 hour turnout is ideal so ensure your paddocks are well cared for throughout the year
- Feed Alfalfa half an hour prior to exercise to protect the stomach lining from acid splashes
- Try to reduce stress as much as possible. Install mirrors in your stable if your horse doesn't like being alone
- Balance exercise with rest, over worked horses are much more susceptible to ulcers
- Try to stick to a routine and alter it as little as possible to keep your horses stress levels to a minimum.



Regular turnout is crucial to help avoid ulcers as it allows the horse to graze, keeping the digestive processes ticking over.

We have over 30 years technical experience specialising in the care of grassland for your horses and ponies. Our range of products include fertiliser, grassland mineral and trace elements and grass seeds specifically selected for horse and pony paddocks.

If you need some advice on how to make the most of your grazing throughout the year, please contact us and we would be happy to help.