

Stomach Ulcers

Could your horse have ulcers?

Possible signs include...

- Poor Performance
- Dull Appearance
- Picky Appetite
- Grumpy Temperament
- Resistance to Riding Aids
- Resistance to Girthing
- Colic

Signs of gastric ulceration can be vague and many horses will display few signs. Gastroscopy involves passing a camera through the nose and into the stomach and is the only way to reliably diagnose ulceration.

Unlike humans who produce gastric acid as required, horses produce gastric acid constantly, whether they are eating or not. Saliva and roughage will help to protect against this acid, so periods without eating will increase the risk of high acid and gastric ulceration.

The horse's stomach is divided into a glandular and a squamous area

Causes and treatment of ulcers in these different areas differs. Squamous ulceration is caused by splashing of stomach acid into this region at the top of the stomach. This most often occurs during exercise and feeding of 1-2l of chaff prior to exercise can help form a protective mat and prevent recurrence.

Glandular ulceration is caused when there is a breakdown in the stomach's normal protective layer. This can be harder to treat and manage. Treatment to help line and protect the stomach will be recommended.

Minimising stress and maximising roughage in the diet are both important. More food should be given during the day and less at night if your horse requires restricted feeding and ad-lib roughage is not appropriate.

For further advice and discussion please do not hesitate to contact us. If you would like to book in for gastroscopy then your horse will need to be starved overnight prior to the procedure in order for us to see all areas of the stomach. This means no straw bedding or turnout, but your horse is welcome to stay overnight at our clinic the night before free of charge in order to fast fully. Your horse will have standing sedation for the procedure and can go home the same day.

You may be worried purely about if your horse has ulcers or not, for example if your horse doesn't like girthing but seems otherwise fit and well. Alternatively you may have more concerns over your horse's health, of which ulcers are a possibility.

Gastroscopy will be performed by our veterinary surgeon with a certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (Equine Medicine), who will discuss any further points of concern.

