

Worried about gastric ulcers?

Deborah Leabeater, MSc, CBiol, MRSB – Lead Nutritionist at Equine America (UK) Ltd, answers some frequently asked questions on Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome.



Q My livery yard offers limited turnout over the Winter months. What can I do to reduce the risk of ulcers?

Horses' digestive systems are designed to trickle feed – to receive an almost continuous supply of high fibre forage, and so the horse constantly secretes acid into the stomach – regardless of whether the stomach has anything in it or not. A grazing horse produces up to 9 gallons of saliva a day, lubricating the food, and helping to neutralize or buffer this acid.

If forage is restricted – either from limited pasture, or restricted forage in his stable, acid will continue to be produced, and less saliva will be produced to neutralize the acid.

Therefore, if your horse will have limited grazing over winter, it is vital that an adequate source of forage is provided in the stable – and ideally forage should be unrestricted (or “ad lib”), to ensure there is always a protective “mat” of forage (containing plenty of neutralizing saliva), to prevent acid splashing onto the unprotected areas of the stomach.

In practice, it may not be possible to provide ad lib forage: however, there are a number of ways to help:

- Provide a lower nutrient level forage (mature hay with more stalk and less leaf), so you can offer more but with the same calorie intake.
- Re-balance the total daily feed, replacing high energy cereal concentrates with high energy forages such as alfalfa and grass chaffs and oil, ideally one with higher omega 3 levels.
- Spread the forage around the stable to encourage foraging behaviour, and increase chewing time, rather than a single net or pile.
- If using a net, use one with smaller holes, to increase the time taken to consume the forage.
- Add clean oat straw to increase chewing time and reduce the overall nutrient specification (always introduce new forages slowly and carefully to prevent colic).
- Before work, especially if forage is restricted, offer a small forage feed like alfalfa chaff, to provide a fibrous mat, preventing acid splashing onto the unprotected mucosa as the horse tenses his abdominal muscles during work.
- Consider adding a gastro-protective supplement, containing ingredients which provide nutritional support for the stomach lining. These supplements will typically contain muco-protective ingredients including pectins, lecithin, mineral antacids, aloe vera, liquorice, marshmallow and glycine.

Q I have recently had my saddle checked, but my horse is still showing signs of discomfort when tacked up. Does he have ulcers?

Discomfort or resentment when being tacked up may reflect a number of conditions, ranging from musculo-skeletal pain, hoof discomfort, to gastric ulcers. Discuss the situation with your vet, to rule out other causes, but in the meantime, there are a number of management issues to consider, which have been shown to predispose to ulcers:

- Stress: social stressors such as bullying from stable neighbours or field companions.
- Stable location: too near the feed room, or where there is a constant flow of other horses/people past the stable door, preventing adequate rest
- High starch diets and limited forage may result in biochemical changes resulting in damage to the stomach lining
- Limited turnout and reduced access to natural protective antioxidants in grass.
- High intensity training, especially on an empty stomach.

If any of the above factors can be readily addressed, they may help to reduce the incidence and severity of ulcers.

Q Can I feed supplements to a broodmare that is prone to ulcers?

Most supplements designed to provide nutritional support for horses with ulcers will be safe to feed to broodmares during gestation and lactation. However, it is advisable to check the label carefully for any stated contra-indications, and if in doubt, contact the manufacturer directly.

Equine America provides a range of pioneering and tailored supplements, with each formulation containing a beneficial blend of ingredients that work together to help achieve optimum health and performance.

www.equine-america.co.uk



Katie Bedwin & Elayla
Reserve National
Young Rider Champion 2019



Uls-gard Pellets is an advanced and effective pelleted formulation to help maintain digestive health and comfort.

Contains key ingredients to help soothe the stomach lining, including pectins, lecithin, aloe vera, marshmallow root, glycine, liquorice.

Plus slow-release calcium and magnesium from marine algae, to help maintain a healthy gut pH. Beta glucans from high nucleotide yeast supports gastric content viscosity and soothe the stomach wall. Also available in a solution.

equine-america.co.uk



CLEAN
SPORT