



EQUINE NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2022

Care Of The Geriatric Horse

Due to advances in care for modern day horses, average life span has increased. The age a horse or pony is considered geriatric varies with each, therefore evaluating based on physical fitness can be a better indicator. Generally, however many consider between 18-20 and above as geriatric.

Considerations for the Ageing Horse:

- Dental disease including tooth loss and diastema (gaps)
- Reduced digestive ability
- Bone and joint degeneration: arthritis etc.
- Decreased immunity: more susceptible to disease and parasite burdens
- Poorer recovery from injury.
- Less able to cope with environmental changes (hot/cold weather)



Dental Disease and Weight Management:

Dental diseases are the most common cause of weight loss. Regular dental examinations should be maintained as your horse ages. Biannual dentals can help keep on top of dental disease allowing us to detect loose or diseased teeth needing attention.

Eventually, tooth loss or decay can result in an inability to efficiently chew feed such as hay and grass. At this point providing a diet that can be easily chewed and digested is essential.

There are many forage replacements available such as pellets or cubes that can be made into a mash, helping your horse when they reach the point that grass, or hay can't be chewed properly. This alongside mineral and vitamin supplementation (e.g. with a balancer) should be sufficient.

Your horse's diet does not need to be complex! We are happy to discuss your horse's diet and any potential changes.

Immune Deficiency:

As your horse ages, their immunity reduces. This makes them more susceptible to worm burdens, infection and age-related diseases.

Regular worm egg counts will help you keep track of their parasite burden, noting any changes that may indicate reduced resilience and allowing prompt treatment.

Annual vaccination remains important in older horses. Because immunity decreases in the older the horse, susceptibility to disease increases.

Vaccination is the best way to reduce the incidence of flu and tetanus. Even though your horse may not go anywhere they may be around horses that do therefore infection is still a risk.

Farriery:

Even though your horse may be retired, routine farriery remains important. Allowing feet to become long or unbalanced can put pressure on tendons and joints and make degenerative conditions such as arthritis worse.

Other Conditions to Consider:

PPID:

PPID or 'Cushing's syndrome' is a degenerative condition affecting the pituitary gland at the base of the brain. It mainly affects horses over the age of 15. It results in an overproduction of a hormone called ACTH (among others), which leads to an overproduction of cortisol (a stress hormone). PPID can result in:

- Laminitis
- Long curly coat or a variation in coat shedding
- Excessive sweating, urination and drinking
- Increased susceptibility to infection (skin, foot/dental abscesses)
- Pot-bellied appearance- due to muscle wastage and fat redistribution
- Lethargy

We can easily test for and diagnose PPID via a blood test. While there is no cure, it can be well managed with medication. PPID testing is more sensitive in the autumn, therefore the next few months would be the ideal time to test.

To discuss any concerns or questions you may have please give us a call on 01328 864444