

WENSUM VALLEY VETS EQUINE NEWSLETTER

– OCTOBER 2023

Disorders of the Equine Eye

Injuries and disease of the eye, eyelid and tear ducts are common presentations within the practice. With many cases being dealt with this summer, this month's newsletter will focus on some of the common disorders we see.

Conditions range from simple conjunctivitis to severe disease/injury threatening the entire eye. Because conditions of the eye can progress so quickly, any signs of discomfort are a concern and should be treated as an emergency.

Signs to Look For:

- Discharge/ tear staining of the eye
- Red, inflamed conjunctiva
- Any discolouration/ cloudiness of the eye
- Eyelid swelling
- 'Squinting', partially/fully closed eye, or 'drooping' eyelids
- Head shy/shaking head, reactive to touch
- Sensitive to bright sunlight- squinting/ seeking dark areas



Clinical Exam of the Eye:

To provide a thorough eye examination your horse likely will need:

- Sedation
- +/- Nerve blocks to aid manipulation of the eyelids
- +/- Local anaesthetic applied to the corneal surface to allow swabbing/examination for foreign bodies

First an overall assessment of the eye will be performed, taking into account any visual defects or obvious abnormalities on the surface of the eye.

Next, examination using an ophthalmoscope to assess the internal structures at the back of the eye, ideally performed in a dark stable/barn to make assessment easier.

A fluorescent dye will likely be applied to the eye. If any discrepancies (ulcers) are present on the cornea, the dye will take, making the defect visible (bright green dye pictured above)

Depending on findings and the severity of the condition presented, further diagnostics may be recommended potentially including:

- Swabbing for bacterial culture and sensitivity
- Smear preparations to assess cell types present could indicate specific conditions

Based on our clinical findings a treatment plan will be implemented.

What Could It Be?

Conjunctivitis

The conjunctiva are the pink membranes that line the inside of the eyelids and eye. Conjunctivitis describes inflammation of this structure. This can occur as a primary problem or secondarily in response to injury or disease of the eye. It is important to determine whether there is an underlying condition causing conjunctivitis therefore a thorough clinical exam is always required.

In simple cases it can be treated successfully with topical medication applied directly to the eye.

Corneal Ulcers:

Corneal ulcers vary in severity; however, most can be quickly and successfully treated with topical eye medication. They can be diagnosed by placing fluorescent dye into the eye. If an ulcer is present the dye is taken up by the cornea allowing clear visualisation of the area.

All cases require a thorough clinical exam to check for foreign bodies or ingrowing eyelashes that may have become lodged or started rubbing the cornea.

Because there are many disorders that can result in corneal ulcers, we may advise taking samples to send away for testing as treatment varies for different conditions.

Equine Recurrent Uveitis

This is characterised by repeated episodes of inflammation in the middle part of the eye (iris, ciliary body and choroid).

Repeated damage caused by uveitis can result in cataracts, glaucoma and even blindness.

The cause of uveitis is not entirely understood however it is believed to be an immune mediated condition potentially influenced by genetic and environmental factors. Infectious organisms have also been implicated, with *Leptospira spp* cultured in 60% of cases.

There is currently no cure for ERU, however we can manage the condition with medications. If the condition becomes very advanced, sometimes removal of the eye is the only option – while this may sound drastic, this can make a huge difference to quality of life.



Treatment

Treatment depends on the diagnosis and tolerance of the horse to medication administration.

In simple cases eye drops/ointments are sufficient to get on top of the condition.

In horses that are becoming difficult to medicate, we may suggest a lavage system be placed beneath the upper or lower eyelid. This allows safer and more effective treatment as medications can be administered through tubing that runs from the eye to the withers.

Other options may include sub-conjunctival injections, oral medications e.g. steroids or antibiotics and in severe cases eye removal.

****Change To Bank Details****

Please note that from September there has been a change of bank details as follows:

Account Name: Independent Vetcare Ltd

Account Number: 01528734

Sort Code: 40-01-94

Please add the reference 2254 and your surname on the account

The outcome of any eye condition is made better with early diagnosis and treatment.

Please contact reception on 01328 386444 if you have any suspicion your horse may have an issue with their eye/s or email us – info@wensumvalleyvets.co.uk