WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

Equine Lameness: Regional Anaesthesia (Nerve Blocking)

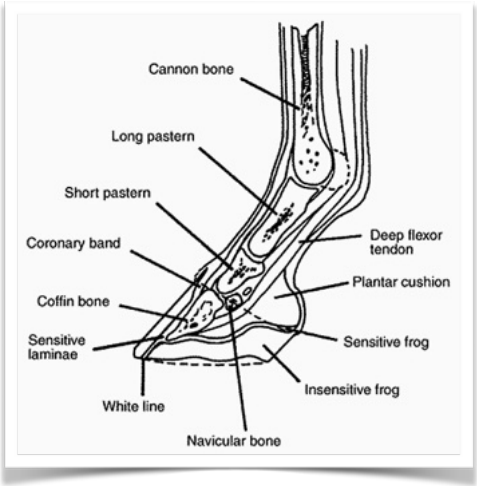
If your horse shows signs of lameness, finding the exact source of the pain is crucial for effective treatment. One of the most useful tools vets use is called 'nerve blocking' or regional anaesthesia. This technique helps us pinpoint the area causing discomfort in your horse's leg, by numbing specific areas of the leg and re-assessing the lameness.

What is Nerve Blocking?

Nerve blocking involves injecting a small amount of local anaesthetic (the same type of medication used by the dentist to numb areas of the mouth) near specific nerves in your horse's leg. This temporarily "turns off" the sensation from a particular area, so your vet can see if the horse's lameness improves when it cannot feel this region.

Why focus on the distal (lower) limb?

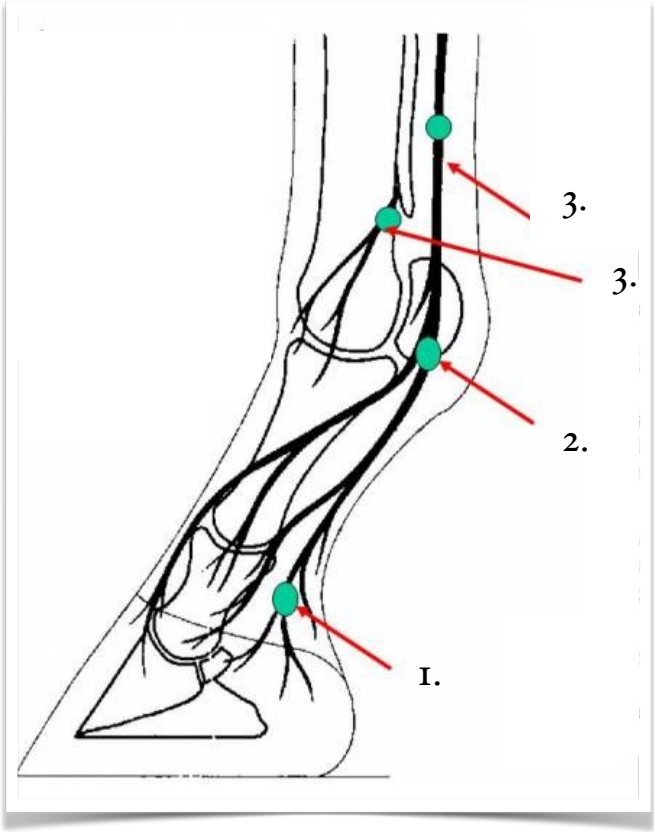
The distal limb includes the lower parts of the leg, such as the hoof, pastern and fetlock - common sites for lameness in horses. Since the leg has many structures close together, nerve blocking helps us isolate which part is causing pain.



How does the process work?

- Initial Exam: Your vet will watch your horse walk and trot to observe and grade the lameness, examine the leg and hoof, and may perform flexion tests to monitor for a change in lameness
- First Block: The vet injects anaesthetic near a nerve supplying a broad area (like the hoof)
- Re-examination: The horse is walked or trotted again. If the lameness significantly improves, the pain source is likely within that blocked area

- Further Blocks: If the lameness does not improve significantly, then further nerve blocks higher up the leg may be carried out
- Joint/synovial space blocks: these are sometimes used on a separate day/visit to identify if one specific joint is the source of the pain
- Diagnosis and Treatment: Once localised to a region diagnostic imaging, such as ultrasound or X-ray can be used and targeted treatments can be planned



What areas of the distal limb Are usually blocked?

Here are some common nerve blocks used:

1. Palmar/Plantar Digital Nerve Block: The majority of the hoof (the heel, sole, and part of the coffin joint (the joint inside the hoof))
2. Abaxial Sesamoid Nerve Block: The entire foot and pastern region up to the lower fetlock
3. Low Palmar/Plantar Nerve Block: The fetlock and structures above the foot

The nerves run down both the inside and outside of the leg so 2 injections are needed for the Palmar/Plantar Digital Nerve Block and 4 injections for the Low Palmar/Plantar Nerve Block (two nerves on each side of the leg)

What should you expect?

• Nerve blocking is a common and routine procedure. Your horse may feel slight discomfort during the injection but it is not generally a painful procedure.

• The numbing effect starts within minutes and lasts about an hour

• Your vet may ask you to move your horse before and after blocking to assess changes if carrier out at your yard

• Most nerve blocking and all joint blocking is carried out at the clinic

Why is this important?

Nerve blocking is an invaluable diagnostic tool in modern equine veterinary medicine. Finding the exact source of lameness means diagnosis of the cause and making a treatment plan can proceed more quickly.

If your horse is showing any signs of lameness or discomfort, contact us on 01328 864444