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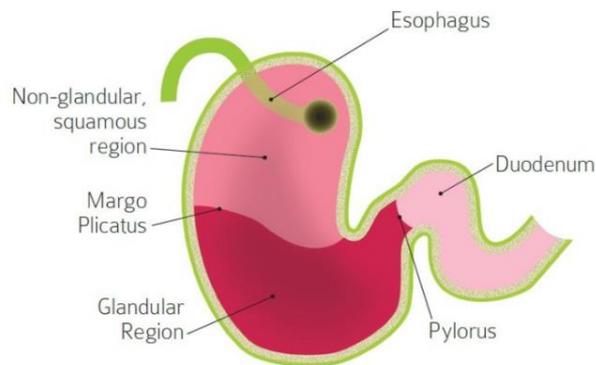
## GASTRIC ULCERS IN HORSES

### Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS)

EGUS is the disease process that occurs when the lining of the horse's stomach becomes damaged by the acid present and required for digestion of food.

There are two main regions of an equine stomach, the glandular and non-glandular portion.

- The non-glandular is the top half of the stomach where food enters from the oesophagus. This is not protected, and when viewed on a gastroscope appears pale pink in colour.
- The glandular is the bottom half of the stomach where the initial act of food digestion occurs. This area appears dark pink and has a mucus lining to protect it from the acid which sits in this area.
- The line between these two regions is known as the margo-plicatus and is a common site to find ulceration.



The causes of ulceration in these two areas vary greatly and therefore treatment and management does also. Non glandular ulcers are often due to down falls in management or feeding, where as glandular ulceration is often due to a breakdown of the mucus barrier and are often related to/associated with other problems.

Glandular ulcers generally heal more slowly than squamous ulcers.

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Many of the following management changes or alterations will be beneficial to short and long term management of your horse suffering with Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome.

### **Medication:**

- Gastroguard is the main formulation of oral Omeprazole available. There is also an injectable form available which works well for glandular ulcers.
  - Omeprazole acts to increasing gastric pH by suppressing acid production.
  - This decreases the irritation to the glandular area of the stomach and should any splash back occur into the squamous region, it is less severe.
- Sucralfate is an additional medication that is often added into treatment protocols alongside omeprazole.
  - It works by forming a barrier over the areas of ulceration, mainly in the glandular region which is where the protection from the stomach acid is mainly required.

### **Feeding:**

- Dietary focus should be on relevant fibre intake, dependent upon ulcer type, and constant provision of fresh water.
  - Long fibre stimulates saliva production which buffers stomach acid
  - It also provides a fibrous mat on top of the stomach acid to reduce/prevent splash back.
- Adding chopped fibre to concentrate feeds is helpful to stimulate further saliva production.
  - Alfalfa has been shown to buffer the acidity in the stomach so is considered a useful chaff in these cases.
- Feed majority of roughage during daytime rather than overnight.
- Soak hay/haylage for 6-12 hours to reduce sugar content if concerns regarding weight gain.
- Corn, vegetable or rapeseed oil (45-100ml twice daily) can increase protective prostaglandin production, potentially improving glandular ulcer healing in addition to proving a non-heating source of calories – although it has no effect in cases of squamous ulceration.

### **Exercise:**

- A scoop of chopped fibre within 30mins of starting exercise will reduce splash lesion risks.
- Intensive exercise has been shown to worsen non-glandular ulceration so rest periods or at least reduction in exercise intensity is recommended during treatment period.

### **Environmental strategies:**

- Limiting stresses e.g. exercise, stabling and transport is very important and helpful.
- Application of stereotypy-reducing strategies may help e.g. multiple haynets in stable to encourage “foraging” activity, herd management, boredom breakers etc.

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### **Supplements:**

- Many commercial antacid preparations are available to help buffer acid including Wright and Morten's Gastric supplement, Cooper Gut Assist and Protexin, which can be used as a preventative measure.
- Pectin-Lecithin have been reported to enhance the glandular mucous barrier and thus healing in some cases.
  - This can be administered as an in feed supplement (Gut Action, Acid-Ease or Equitop ProNutrin)
  - Or as a feed (Dengie Happy Tummy).
    - However you must ensure you are feeding a sufficient quantity to reach the levels required to benefit the horse, so be aware with regards to weight gain etc.
- Peptizole at a lower dose (1 mg/kg) is an effective way of preventing recurrence during stressful periods and can be used in horses competing under FEI regulations.

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