

Gastric Ulcers in Horses

Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS) is the erosion of the stomach lining due to prolonged exposure to the acid produced by the stomach. It can affect 1 in 3 leisure horses with a higher incidence in competition and racehorses. EGUS can be a serious condition. The earlier the gastric ulcers are found, the better the prognosis for the horse.



In adults, gastric ulcers are mainly associated with stabled horses with reduced access to continuous feeding, overfeeding with concentrate with minimum roughage and long term use of certain drugs e.g. bute.

Signs of gastric ulcers can be poor performance and appetite, mild or recurrent colic, dullness, attitude change and weight loss. In foals gastric ulceration may be fatal and may show signs as poor appetite, poor body condition, rough coat, frequent dorsal recumbence, diarrhea, depression, grinding teeth, pot belly and excessive salivation.

One or more of the above clinical signs may indicate the presence of gastric ulcers. They are graded 1– 4 and grade 2 and above are considered to be significant.

There are two options for diagnosing EGUS:

1. Succeed Test:

This involves testing a fresh faeces sample from the affected horse. Antibodies are used to measure occult blood in the faeces.

2. Gastroscopy:

This is a definitive method of diagnosis; evaluating the lining of the stomach and pylorus to investigate the presence of ulcers.

The Succeed Test will not detect early grade 1 gastric ulcers, but is an inexpensive non-invasive test which usually detects more advanced gastric ulceration (grade 2 and above).

Gastroscopy is relatively expensive in comparison to the faecal test, however, it is a more successful method of diagnosing *early stage* EGUS.

Gastroscope days are held regularly at the clinic throughout the year. If you feel your horse or pony may have ulcers then please call the Equine Centre on 01226 763542