



What's Up Doc?

April 2018

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The Who's, What's and Where's of **Gastroscopy**



A case of common heartburn in humans is cause for intense discomfort. Imagine being a horse with gastric ulcers being asked to complete a strenuous task under such discomfort and pain. An estimated 50%-90% of horses are affected by gastric ulcers. Gastric ulcers can affect horses of any age. Foals are also susceptible because of their highly acidic digestive secretions. In adult horses, gastric

ulcers are most common in performance horses. Exercise can increase the production of gastric fluids and decrease the level of blood flow to the GI tract. Working horses also experience acidic gastric secretions that splash the more sensitive upper lining of the stomach resulting in ulceration.

Horses are grazers, which means they are meant to be eating small portions throughout the day. Humans have changed the horse's eating schedule to 2-3 large meals a day, sometimes with free choice hay. Horses produce gastric fluid 24/7, up to 9 gallons per day. The feed and saliva help to buffer the acid, but with the segmented feeding schedule the stomach lining is left unprotected through large periods of the day. Gastric ulcers are also prevalent in horses that experience regular environmental stressors like being trailered frequently or stalled for extended periods of time. NSAID's, like Bute and Banamine[®], deteriorate the protective lining of the stomach which allows the acid to break through and create ulcers.

Clinical signs of ulcers can include poor appetite, dullness, attitude changes, decreased performance, reluctance to train, poor body condition, poor hair coat, weight loss, excessive recumbency, low-grade/frequent colic and loose feces. Even a horse that appears completely healthy can have gastric ulcers. The ONLY way to definitively tell if your horse has gastric ulcers is with a gastroscope. Dr. Shoemaker says "One of the biggest values of gastroscopy versus treatment without diagnosis has been the less suspicious horses have been identified with greater lesions and have shown significant improvement. These horses wouldn't have been diagnosed without scoping."

Gastric Ulcers in Horses



Gastroscopy is a simple, minimally invasive way to get a clear visualization of the esophagus, stomach, and beginning segment of the small intestine. To see the tract clearly, the horse will need to have been fasted for 16 hours prior to scoping. This includes the removal of all bedding; a hungry horse will eat shavings. Water should be taken away 6 hours prior to the procedure. Gastroscopy is not painful for the horse; the scope is only about 1 centimeter in diameter and a light sedation keeps the horse from being concerned by the feeling of the passing scope. Then the scope is passed through the nasal cavity, and down the esophagus where the veterinarian can view the whole stomach. The veterinarian uses the gastroscope to put air into the stomach to distend the area for better viewing. The veterinarian can also send water through the gastroscope to rinse down the walls of the stomach and esophagus. Our gastroscope equipment can snap images as well as take videos of the GI tract as it advances through the gastroscopy process. The veterinarian will use approved grading scales to evaluate a horse's level of ulceration.



If gastric ulcers are found, the usual treatment is omeprazole. Countryside suggests using Gastrogard® as it is the most effective product on the market due to the special carrier it uses to aid in absorption. Compounded products do not use the same carrier therefore less omeprazole is absorbed. After the prescribed treatment plan is completed, we recommend a recheck gastroscopy to be sure that ulcers have healed.

Having a definitive diagnosis to treat a horse with ulcers is very important to develop a treatment plan and to the horse's health and comfort. Different grades of ulcers can require various treatment plans and durations of treatment.

Countryside Large Animal Vet is having a Gastroscopy day on April 28th. Gastroscopic procedure will be 50% off!! Call to schedule soon before the day fills up 970-351-7045.

A photograph of the packaging for Gastrogard (omeprazole) Oral Paste for Equine Ulcers. The box is dark green and black with a yellow horse head silhouette. The text on the box includes 'GASTROGARD® (omeprazole) Oral Paste for Equine Ulcers', 'Merial', 'Make every dose count. See New Instructions.', 'PRODUCT 368191', 'Contains 7 syringes', and 'INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED'. Two white syringes with green plungers are shown in the background, one of which has 'GASTROGARD' printed on it. A green callout box in the upper right corner contains the text: 'Purchase Gastrogard and receive \$3 off per tube from April 28-May 13!'.