



SPRING TIME LAMINITIS

Did you know that after colic, laminitis and founder is the second biggest killer of horses in Australia?

Laminitis is the name given to this serious hoof disease, referring to damage to the laminae which is the connective tissue connecting the hoof bones to the hoof wall.

Laminitis causes rotation of the pedal (coffin) bone within the hoof, sinking down, rotating forward and rubbing on the sole causing extreme pain and in some cases penetrating through the sole. It can damage a number of blood vessels and tissue due to bone movement and without treatment can cause many serious permanent changes to the hoof growth mechanisms, including cracks to the coronet band, flattened or convex sole, rings in the hoof and separation between the sole and hoof wall.

There are a number of different causes of laminitis, spring grass (excess carbohydrates and Nitrogen) being a main culprit and with the warmer weather approaching, much needed winter rain and lush green grasses we must monitor the grazing habits of our equine companions, protecting them from the hidden dangers in their paddocks.

Feed related laminitis will happen if there is an over flow of starch in the large intestine - which will occur when the horse eats too much lush green grass or from grain. Fat ponies, crested horses and horses with a history of laminitis are more prone to an attack but laminitis isn't limited to such horses. As the president of Save a Horse Australia Horse Rescue and Sanctuary we have also treated underweight thoroughbreds with acute laminitis.

Springtime cold nights and warm days can drive sugar and starch levels in growing grass to extremely high levels, with the highest sugar and starch content during bright sunlight. So it's best to avoid allowing your horse to graze when the sun is out. Locking your horse up during the day and allowing some grazing at night or grazing on cloudy, rainy days will help protect your

horse from feed related laminitis. It is important to remember that when locking your horse or pony up, you will need to feed a low GI diet high in fibre and you should never starve a horse with laminitis - contrary to popular belief.

Laminitis causes damage to the hoof and your horse will need a number of vitamins and minerals to help repair that damage, including protein, calcium, zinc, biotin, copper and magnesium. An excellent product containing biotin, zinc and magnesium is called "Retread" by Nature Vet and we have used it on our rescue horses with great success.

Remember that when feeding zinc, you must also feed a balanced ratio of copper because too much zinc can interfere with copper causing a deficiency and too much copper can cause a zinc deficiency. The recommended ratio of copper to zinc is 1:3, so if your horse is getting 600mg of zinc per day then the copper amount needed is 200mg.

Calcium and protein are both found in lucerne so it's important not to cut lucerne out of the horse's diet and soaking hay overnight will reduce the sugar and starch content. Dolomite is also an excellent magnesium and calcium supplement.

Spring grass is also low in magnesium which is a vital mineral in helping your horse metabolise sugars. A supplement such as magnesium oxide should be provided if your horse has lush pasture. If your horse is prone to laminitis, a daily supplement of Founder Guard, which contains Virginiamycin, will reduce the lactic acid in the hind gut, killing the bacteria causing laminitis.

Prevention is always better than the cure, so it's important to monitor your horse's grazing patterns in spring and give correct supplements but what do you do if your horse starts to show signs of laminitis and what are the signs to look out for?

Symptoms

One of the first and most common symptoms of laminitis is lameness. Your horse will be reluctant to move forward, standing so that his weight is taken off the affected hooves - laminitis is more likely to occur in the front hooves.

He will shift weight from one hoof to the other hoof, his hoof will feel warmer than normal and he will respond to sole pressure. When picking up one hoof he will be reluctant due to not being able to bare all of his weight on the other hoof.

Other symptoms include depression, trembling, anxiety, sweating, high temperature and increased heart rate.

If your horse is showing signs of laminitis you must seek professional treatment by a trained veterinarian immediately. Laminitis must be treated in the early stages to prevent permanent damage and even death.

Treatment

At the first onset of laminitis, take your horse out of any lush pasture, lock him up in a stable or yard with soft bedding and reduce the amount of carbohydrates from his diet.

If there are changes in the hoof temperature, place his affected hooves in cold water, this will help increase blood flow. Lack of blood flow to the hooves restricts oxygen and amino acids reaching the laminae causing it to breakdown and limited or no blood supply to the hooves will result in the horse having to be euthanised. Your vet will prescribe an anti-inflammatory drug, Bute being the most common, which will offer pain relief, reduce inflammation and increase blood flow.

Heart-bar shoes are excellent in acute cases. They reduce sole pressure and help limit pedal bone rotation but it's extremely important that they are made especially for your horse's hooves because an improperly fitted shoe will aggravate the condition and cause pain. Contact a proper corrective farrier who makes his shoes from scratch to fit heart-bar shoes on your horse.

Please note that this article is not a substitute for a consultation with a veterinarian and laminitis is a medical emergency that requires immediate treatment. Call your vet if you suspect that your horse has laminitis.

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