



GETTING YOUR HORSE READY FOR SPRING

Spring is apparently here and many of you will be hoping to turn out the horses for longer during the lighter nights and between blizzards!! Spring represents many challenges to our equine companions and we as clinicians see a peak in certain disease conditions such as laminitis and colic. We as horse owners can significantly decrease that risk by following a few simple rules.

Spring sees the highest rate of dietary change for our horses. This in itself can lead to problems such as colic due to the switch from low carbohydrate sources of forage such as hay or haylage to highly fermentable lush spring grass. This change can be abrupt and will lead to the intestinal tract being unable to switch on the enzyme pathways to metabolise the sugars and protein quickly enough to prevent fluid shifting into the gut and gas formation which lead to painful but relatively harmless spasmodic colic. Also, the bacteria populations in the colon take several weeks to adapt to any new feedstuff and rapid introduction of fermentable sugar, such as in spring grass, can lead to decreased numbers of beneficial bacteria and increased harmful bugs. This in turn can lead to diarrhoea, intestinal displacements or impactive colic which can be more serious requiring extensive veterinary care. Allowing limited turnout in a sparse field is the best way to prevent significant dietary upset and ensures the horse still gets supplementary forage for the first few weeks. As the spring progresses then the amount of turnout can be increased and a move to a more lush pasture can occur.

In addition to this, the high levels of sugars pose a particular challenge to any of horses which has come through the winter carrying too much condition. Weight loss is a natural part of over-wintering horses and our native breeds especially are physiologically programmed to lose significant amounts of fat in the winter. If they fail to do this they risk becoming hyperinsulinaemic (type 2 diabetes) and are then at significant risk of developing laminitis when exposed to lush grass or high sugar feeds. This is a massive problem in the UK and reflects our attitudes of trying to have horses in show condition (over fat) all year round rather than allowing natural weight loss to occur in the winter. Allowing a gradual increase in turnout during the spring and using a muzzle to limit the amount of grass the horse can eat significantly reduces this risk. In addition there are several other treatment strategies to reduce the chances of laminitis which we as your vets can discuss and provide.



Spring is traditionally one of the peak periods of activity for parasites. Many of you are worming your horse before turnout or doing faecal worm egg counts (FWECS). In the last few years we have been recommending the use of FWECS to minimise our use of wormers and to prevent resistance. Due to this we would recommend that before turnout to the spring fields all horses have a FWECS. Any horses with positive counts should then be wormed and kept in for 14 days when another count is performed. This will significantly reduce the chances of resistant parasite eggs being shed on the fresh pasture.



If you have any further questions then please contact a member of the practice team and watch our website or follow us on Facebook for updates throughout the spring.

PREPARING FOR YOUR MARE TO FOAL

It is an exciting but nervous time waiting for your mare's big day, especially if this is your first foaling experience. Estimating the exact date is difficult as the gestation period ranges from 320-360 days but look out for the mare's udder 'bagging up' and her vulva swelling which indicates foaling may occur anytime in the next 1-4 weeks. Closer to the time (2-4 days prior) milk may appear on the surface of her teats—this is called waxing up. Setting up a camera in the stable is useful for 24/7 surveillance as mares will often wait until no-one is around to foal.

The majority of mares manage perfectly on their own, however our own team of dedicated equine vets are only a phone call away if you need any assistance during the foaling process (whatever the hour).

Here are a few helpful tips if you're not sure when is appropriate to phone the vet.

- Stage 1 of labour is characterised by the mare becoming restless, lying down and getting up more and sometimes sweating, concluding with her 'waters breaking'. This behaviour can last for 1-4 hours and can sometimes be confused with colic.
- In stage 2 the mare will begin contractions and will push to expel the foal. This stage is rapid in a normal foaling and if the mare is straining unproductively for more than 20 minutes there may be a problem which may need veterinary assistance to correct.
- Stage 3 is the delivery of the placenta. It is important to monitor this as a retained placenta can make your mare very ill. This should be passed within 4 hours of foaling. It is a good idea to keep the placenta for examination if one of our vets is coming out to you.



MONITORING YOUR NEW BORN FOAL

Your mare has foaled successfully – now what?

Keeping an eye on your neonate is very important to ensure it is on its feet and drinking the mare's colostrum (the first nutrient-rich milk produced) as soon as possible as this provides the crucial antibodies needed to fight any infections it may encounter. Dipping the naval with iodine or chlorhexidine will reduce the risk of infection too. A normal foal should be lying sternal within 15 minutes, standing within an hour and suckling in 2-4 hours. Please do not hesitate to contact one of our equine vets if you would like a chat about anything regarding your mare and/or foal.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Some of you may not know that we as your vets are obliged to do a minimum of 35 hours of CPD per year (increased to 55 for advanced veterinary practitioners). We usually exceed this by a wide margin by reading journals, doing online tutorials and lectures, and attending or presenting lectures and courses around the country. These allow us to ensure our skill sets and knowledge are the best possible and that we are at the forefront of equine medicine. This year so far our vets have attended courses on prior to purchase exams, lameness, anaesthesia, and have delivered lectures on infectious disease control (all before the end of March). These courses are very expensive, hard work and time consuming but reflect our commitment to provide you with the best possible service. As well as this, we continue to invest in our equipment. Recently we have purchased a state of the art ultrasound machine which will allow us to provide our clients with improved service especially for abdominal and cardiac diagnostics.

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