

courtesy of Valley Vet Supply

How familiar are you with the signs of equine ulcers and the preventive measures to take?

Ulcers impact 60% of show horses and 90% of racehorses, according to American Association of Equine Practitioners. But racehorses and performance horses are not the only horses at risk for Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS). The painful condition can affect all horses, regardless of age, breed or riding discipline. Equine stomach ulcers are caused by excess stomach acid, which horses often produce as a result of stress, among other factors.

Nelda Kettles knows the signs of equine ulcers like the back of her hand. Alongside her husband Larry, Nelda co-owned and operated CK Running Horses for more than 30 years, and after breeding and raising Thoroughbred racehorses, they wanted to give back to the industry. Together, they founded the Thoroughbred aftercare organization, Horse and Hound Rescue Foundation, which to date has found homes for more than 300 off-track Thoroughbreds.

“The statistics of ulcers are frightening. Some 90% of horses coming off the track have ulcers,” said Nelda. When Kentucky-bred Bluegrass Bronco – a war horse with 38 starts under his girth – arrived to Horse and Hound Rescue Foundation, “He was suffering from ulcers so badly, you could touch his side, and he would start bucking – he was not happy,” said Nelda.



“We immediately put him on UlcerGard. He was adopted out to an equine veterinarian who continues to keep him on UlcerGard [for prevention of equine ulcers].”

By preventing equine ulcers, “The weight comes back, and quickly you see a world of difference,” said Nelda. “Ulcers in horses can be frustrating, but when they are taken care of, it’s like night and day. Horses are happier. They eat better, gain weight and have a better disposition overall.”

Frequently Asked Questions About Ulcers in Horses

Can equine ulcers impact a horse’s competitive performance?

For a closer look, one animal health company conducted a study examining 84 horses with

Written by courtesy of Valley Vet Supply
Thursday, 27 May 2021 21:40

ulcers. Some 77% displayed poor performance, resulting in loss of jumping style, resistance to dressage work and training, stiffness and lack of response to a rider's leg. When asked if a horse's performance can be impacted from ulcers, Nelda says, "There is absolutely a difference in how horses perform. Nobody wants to run with belly ache, and ulcers definitely give belly aches and affect a horse's competitive spirit."

What causes ulcers in horses?

Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome is most often the direct result from physical stress and behavioral stress. The list below outlines examples of both stressors on horses, some of which are commonly experienced among performance horses competing in any discipline.

Physical stress:

- Training
- Illness
- Pain, such as lameness
- Surgery

Behavioral stress:

- Transport
- Stall confinement
- Changes in routine
- Social regrouping
- Weaning

What are signs of ulcers in horses?

Horses can react to gastric pain in a variety of ways. Irritability while being groomed, changes in attitude, resistance while being tacked up or under saddle, and stress-related habits like cribbing can be signs of gastric ulcers. But, so often these signs are dismissed as "bad behavior." Ulcers could be the cause. Is your horse displaying any of these behaviors, or the common signs of ulcers in horses outlined below? If so, you may need to talk with your veterinarian.

- Poor performance (the No. 1 sign)
- Looking at his side
- Weight loss
- Reduced appetite
- Poor hair coat
- Recurrent colic
- Attitude changes

How are ulcers in horses diagnosed?

Proper diagnosis is crucial for fast, effective treatment of ulcers in horses. A gastroscopic exam

allows your veterinarian to examine the inside of the stomach and to definitively diagnose equine ulcers. If an ulcer is found, your horse may be prescribed treatment, and recommendations may be made for environmental and management changes that can help prevent ulcers in the future.

How do you prevent and treat ulcers in horses?

Equine ulcers can be prevented through three different methods that include reducing stressors, altering feed strategies and through trusted medications.

1. Reduce the above outlined stressors horses may experience, and offer them more turnout, horse toys and distractions, and minimize overtraining if possible.
2. Alter feed strategies to include free-choice hay, multiple small grain meals throughout the day, decreased amount of grain in rations, and to include alfalfa hay, which creates a buffering effect on your horse's stomach, developing more saliva production. Some experts have even referred to alfalfa as "horse Tums."
3. Provide trusted medications to help horses suffering from ulcers. A horse diagnosed with gastric ulcers must be treated. GastroGard (omeprazole) is the only proven effective and safe treatment and is available with a prescription from your veterinarian. You also can further prevent ulcers by using UlcerGard paste (omeprazole) during times of stress.

Preventing ulcers is an important part of your horse's overall health program; you can learn more about horse health solutions by visiting veterinarian-founded www.ValleyVet.com.