

Summer Issue

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# Summer at Priors Farm



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## Gastric Ulcer Awareness Week

This May saw Gastric ulcer awareness week and as part of that week, Priors Farm held lecture evenings at Malthouse Barn Equine Clinic and Oldencraig Equestrian Centre. The evenings were hosted by Ellie Burfoot Msc of Merial Animal Health and both were a great success. The talks were followed by a gastroscopy day at Priors Farm in early June 2007 .

The symptoms of equine gastric ulcers can be vague and variable. This means that they could be one of the most under-diagnosed problems in the equine field with as many as 60% of performance horses and 40% of leisure horses affected.

The clinical signs of a horse suffering from gastric ulcers include:

- lack of appetite
- colic
- poor performance
- poor hair coat quality
- poor condition
- sudden onset of vices such as crib-biting, weaving and box walking

Diagnosis is difficult using clinical signs alone as signs mimic many other diseases. The only reliable method of diagnosis is to examine the stomach lining with a gastro-scope. We need extra long endoscopes (3 metres in length)

to reach the stomach of an adult horse.

Treatment is threefold: prevention of clinical signs, promotion of ulcer healing and prevention of recurrence.

Medical treatment of ulceration in the past was difficult and, in many cases, unsuccessful. Treatments have included antacids, Histamine antagonists and ulcer-coating agents. None of these is licensed for use in horses or 100% effective. However, a treatment has now been developed that is safe and effective. Omeprazole ('Gastroguard') prevents stomach glands producing too much acid by "blocking" the acid pump. Treatment is by mouth for 28-days. 'Gastroguard' will stop clinical signs and promote ulcer healing.



*A gastric ulcer in a horse*

Management changes are essential to prevent recurrence.

These changes include increased turn-out, a reduction in the proportion of carbohydrates in the diet, increased access to grass and allowing high-fibre feed before exercise. A reduction in the intensity of training may also be necessary for some horses. Even a short period of turnout in a small safe paddock can make a big difference.

## Summer Conjunctivitis

Now that summer is here - well, sort of - the fly season has begun. With hotter weather, houseflies and stable flies will appear in larger numbers. Flies that have just landed on a drooping and then land on your horse's eye are an obvious infection hazard! We are already getting many enquiries about horses with inflamed eyes or conjunctivitis.

Eyes are prone to injury that, if not treated quickly and correctly, can be serious. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of talking to one of our vets if your horse has a painful eye. You can usually treat these yourself with little difficulty but diagnosis is important for correct treatment.

Prevention is better than cure and fly masks can greatly reduce the incidence of conjunctivitis. The irritated eye is often rubbed, potentially causing further damage such as corneal ulcers. Treatment normally involves the use of a topical antibiotic or antibiotic combined with a steroid ointment. A long acting antibiotic cream is highly effective and usually only needs one application. In very mild cases the use of a wet teabag can be very effective!

Always be suspicious of a more serious injury if only one eye is affected and you cannot gently pull the eyelids apart without causing pain.

## Dentistry (continued): Incisors

The incisor teeth are found at the very front of the mouth and are essential for a horse to eat correctly. The incisors' role is to grasp food, shear off fibres if necessary (such as with grass or hay), and hold food so that the tongue can manipulate it to the back of the mouth.

When the incisors are not functioning correctly a horse can have difficulty grasping food. This condition can be a particular problem for aged horses. Many horses over 25 years old have worn down their incisors to the level of the gum making gripping food difficult. However, a horse's lips are highly mobile and strong and many such horses are capable of grasping long stemmed grass and long hay and can still suck up a liquid feed. Occasionally a younger horse will be seen with heavily worn incisors; these tend to be or have been crib-biters or box chowers. They can be given special diets that reduce the amount of incisor work needed to eat.

Many horses have poorly aligned incisors preventing a correct incisor 'bite'. Unless the alignment is extreme, many of these have no problem grasping their food at all. Unfortunately, if a horse has a severe incorrect bite, it is not able to chew correctly. The effects from this poor chew are usually

seen in the cheek teeth, at the back of the mouth. Cheek tooth overgrowths, such as hooks on the front upper cheek teeth or at the back of the lower cheek teeth, often accompany an incisor problem.

When problems are found in both the incisor teeth and the cheek teeth, they must be corrected together. If only one problem is corrected in isolation, the chewing action will not be changed. If these problems are severe, it may be unwise (and too painful) to correct the entire problem in one go and several correction sessions may be preferable.

If a horse has a minor incisor problem, no treatment may be required. **All too often, horses' incisors are over-treated.** Correcting incisors by grinding can be painful and incorrect dental treatment can lead to a radical change in chewing that actually interferes with normal digestion.

**Incisor correction is a specialist area and we strongly advise you to seek a veterinary opinion before any horse's incisors are treated.**

If you have any questions regarding your horse's teeth or dentistry, please contact Priors Farm on 01342 823011 or Malthouse Barn on 01273 890700.



*A severe incisor 'overbite'*

*"incisor problems are too often over-treated"*

### Some of the important disorders that we may face....



**Parrot mouth, 'undershot' (sometimes called 'Overbite')**

The upper incisors protrude in front of the lower incisors. There are two causes: Hereditary – when a horse is born with shorter lower jaw; or Developmental – when cheek teeth overgrowths result in a shift in alignment of the bite.

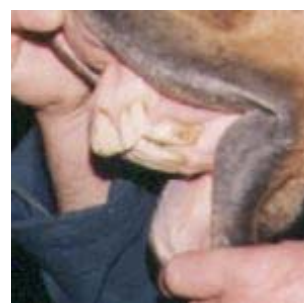
Poor incisor alignment prevents side to side chewing causing improper and excessive cheek teeth wear. The horse is forced to chew incorrectly over a period of time making any cheek tooth abnormalities worse. 'Overbites' can also cause severe discomfort with the bit.

Treatment involves reduction of the length of the upper incisors and correction of any cheek tooth abnormalities.



**Ventral Curvature ('smile')**

In this condition the outer lower corner incisors grow longer relative to the outer upper corner incisors. This can happen when deciduous caps are retained on upper corner incisors stopping normal permanent incisors from coming through. A 'smile' can also arise from abnormal chewing secondary to cheek tooth malocclusion. A 'smile' will stop a horse from chewing freely side to side and often leads to improper and excessive cheek tooth wear. To correct a smile, the length of upper central incisors and lower corner incisor must be carefully reduced to allow free side to side movement.



*The same 'overbite' corrected*

For further information about dentistry and more advice regarding other equine health issues please visit our website: [www.priorsfarm.co.uk](http://www.priorsfarm.co.uk).