

Our news and updates

Malcolm Morley has an exciting and interesting year ahead. Alongside practising as a horse vet, he has always enjoyed taking on influential roles within the veterinary profession. These have included chairing reviews of pre-purchase examination in the UK and Ireland as well as leading a UK-wide review of bovine TB policy. From the end of September, he is expected to take on the role of Junior Vice President of the British Veterinary Association (BVA). The BVA is the largest veterinary association in the UK, with over 18,000 vets of all disciplines. The job involves supporting and representing the UK veterinary profession to the government and many other organisations.

We wish Malcolm well with this new challenge!

While it does mean Malcolm will reduce his hours at **Stable Close Equine Practice** he will still be working with us 2 days every week and covering out-of-hours emergencies as usual.

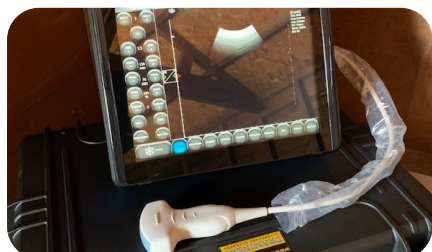
On the days he is not with us we are delighted that **Vicky**, having returned from her maternity leave at the beginning of the year and slotted back into the practice as if she never left, will be stepping in from September. Many of you will know Vicky as she has been a member of the practice for some years now and is a very valued member of our team. Vicky is continuing her studies for her certificate in Advanced Equine Veterinary Practice alongside her clinical work in practice.

We will also be welcoming **Louise** back to Stable Close Equine. Louise is an experienced clinician who has worked with us over the past few years and has been much missed during her absence this last year. Louise has worked in all aspects of equine practice and is an asset to our team.



New hi-tech ultrasound scanner

We delighted to announce the addition of a new hi-tech ultrasound scanner to our mobile diagnostic kit. The scanner is a light weight, battery operated system with a touch sensitive display. The new software technology creates enhanced contrast and sharpness to produce really high quality images. It will allow us to more accurately image the more difficult areas of the skeleton as well as providing superior images of those areas we are regularly scanning.



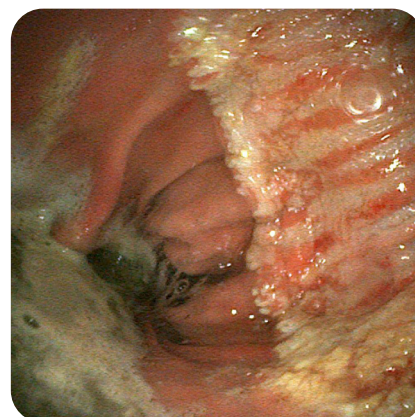
Could your horse be suffering from gastric ulcers?

We continue to have great diagnostic results with our high definition gastroscope. It has enabled us to diagnose significant gastric disease where it is present in cases of for example weight loss, failing to put on condition, mild colic and other broader intestinal symptoms. It has also allowed us to fully assess all aspects of the 'poorly performing' horse - which may be showing resentment of girthing, going forwards when ridden or may be responding adversely to the rider's leg. The accurate diagnosis of the site and extent of the disease allows us to select the most beneficial treatment protocol.

Symptoms can include:

- Poor condition
- Reluctance to eat
- Discomfort when girthing or grooming
- Weight loss
- Recurrent or acute colic
- Poor performance
- Changes in attitude and behaviour

If you are concerned your horse has gastric ulcers please call us to discuss.



Autumn worming



Targeted worming is essential to reduce the incidence of resistance to wormers and involves only treating your horse when required, based on faecal worm egg counts (FWECS). FWECS should be done every 3-6 months, depending on the horse and its environment. The horse will only need worming if the faeces sample contains a high number of worm eggs.

Tapeworms and encysted cyathostomins (red worms) are difficult to assess based on a FWECS and therefore treatment of 'at risk' patients may be required and should be based on advice from your veterinary surgeon.

Poisonous Plants



There are a number of poisonous plants which can lead to disease in horses. As autumn arrives, the grass growth starts to slow, and this can lead to horses accidentally ingesting poisonous plants, such as:

- Oak leaves & acorns
- Sycamore seeds and seedlings
- Bracken
- Yew
- Rhododendron
- Buttercups
- Deadly nightshade
- Privet
- Foxglove
- Ivy
- Ragwort

Maintaining a good pasture is essential in minimising the risk of exposure to these toxic plants and it is really important to regularly check your horse's paddock regularly. Removing these plants will prevent your horse from ingesting them.

If you suspect your horse has been poisoned, call your vet immediately. Don't take any risks!



Golden Oldies - a guide to caring for the senior horse

This September we are celebrating all the golden oldies. Like humans, horses and ponies are living longer, thanks to the help of advances in veterinary care. A horse is classed as a veteran from 15 years and over, but that does not mean they have to retire. Many senior horses continue to compete and lead very active lives well into their 20s. However, as the years pass your horse is likely to show obvious signs of ageing.

Normal signs of ageing are:

- Drooping of the lower lip
- Grey hairs (mainly around eyes and muzzle)
- Loss of muscle tone
- Deepening of the hollows above the eyes

However, your horse may also show more serious ageing signs and it is advisable to contact your vet if you notice any of these **abnormal signs**:

- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty eating
- Musculoskeletal stiffness and a decrease in joint flexion
- Exercise intolerance/fatigue
- Changes in hair coat

Your horse's annual vaccination appointment is a good opportunity to discuss any horse health concerns you may have so any problems may be diagnosed early.



Weight loss

Weight loss is one of the most common and visible signs in the senior horse that something isn't right. Monitoring their weight is important to keep on track of their management and to help detect illness earlier.

Body condition scoring (BCS)

The most effective way to monitor your horse's bodyweight and condition is by body condition scoring. The BCS is a graded scale (between 0-5, with 2.5 being ideal condition) and assesses the amount of fat covering present on the neck, withers, shoulder, ribs, loin and tailhead.

Weighing your horse

In an ideal situation, you would weigh your horse on an equine weighbridge to get an accurate weight. However, if this is not possible or accessible then a weigh tape can be used. Make sure the horse is standing square and on a flat surface, and position the tape around the girth area, just behind the withers. Take the measurement where the end of the tape meets the weight.

Common causes of weight loss:

- Dental problems
- Worms
- Cushing's disease (PPID)
- Diet

Less common causes:

- Liver damage/disease
- Intestinal disease
- Kidney dysfunction/disease/problems
- Infections
- Tumours

Golden Oldies

Dental disease

One of the main causes of loss of condition is dental disease. Dental care is extremely important to the health and welfare of your horses. As herbivores they rely on the efficient grinding mechanism that is their teeth to obtain adequate nourishment.

What are the signs of a dental problem?

Clinical signs of dental disease are variable and sometimes there may be no obvious signs at all.

Common indicators of dental problems:

- Quidding – when a horse is unable to completely chew their food and spit out partly chewed food
- Halitosis – bad breath
- Behavioural issues
- Chewing on one side of the mouth
- Lack of appetite

Equine teeth are continually erupting and as the mouth matures the teeth are prone to issues. As horses get older, their teeth have a much shorter reserve crown (the portion within the tooth socket) and eventually the horse runs out of tooth, which can cause numerous problems. It is therefore very important to have regular check-ups, to ensure your horse's mouth stays healthy.

Regular dental check-ups

In recent years equine dentistry is an area of veterinary medicine in which there has been many significant advances.

With the myriad of dental problems which may be found in the geriatric patient, regular examination is all the more important.



Nutrition/diet

A key factor in maintaining a healthy senior horse is nutrition. As horses get older their digestive efficiency reduces, which means they absorb less protein and nutrients from their food.

There is no one-size-fits-all option, so what you choose to feed should be adapted depending on their health and condition.

If your horse is no longer able to eat hay, you will need to provide fibre through a hay replacer. Horses with dental problems may also require a special diet as they may find chewing difficult.

Colic

Whilst senior horses are more susceptible to certain types of colic such as impactions and lipomas, they have no difference in survival and recovery from surgical colic problems than younger horses.

Laminitis

As horses get older they may become more susceptible to laminitis due to underlying endocrine (hormonal) disease, such as PPID. Laminitis is a painful and potentially devastating disease that causes pathological changes in the anatomy of the foot that can lead to long lasting, crippling changes in function or even, in some cases, such severe pain that euthanasia is required.

The classical signs of laminitis are easily recognised and include:

- Weight shifting
- Reluctance to move
- Rocking back onto the heels
- Increase in hoof wall temperature and digital pulses
- Stiffness at walk especially on turning
- Discomfort when being ridden over hard ground

Watch that your horse does not become overweight. You should carefully monitor your horse's diet. Restrict their grass intake where necessary by strip grazing using electric tape or using a muzzle. Monitoring hay intake by weighing nets may also be required.

Golden Oldies

Cushing's Disease (PPID)

When older horses and ponies are prone to laminitis it is important to test for PPID, along with other endocrine diseases such as equine metabolic syndrome (EMS).

PPID can be seen in any horse but more often it is seen in senior horses and ponies while being rare in younger horses. It is due to degeneration of the pituitary gland at the base of the brain. Dysfunction of this gland results in higher than normal levels of adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH) and other hormones, which through resulting changes in the body, can lead to an increased risk of laminitis. A blood test carried out by your vet can diagnose this condition and enable treatment and management regimes to be instigated, if appropriate.

Clinical signs

- Laminitis
- Excessive hair growth or abnormal retention of the hair coat in the summer
- Abnormal fat deposition and insulin resistance may develop in up to 60% of horses with PPID. A common site of increased fat deposition is around the eyes
- Increased drinking and urination may occur
- Increased sweating may be seen, even in horses that don't have an excessively long hair coat
- Lethargy, or a more docile temperament, may be observed and usually resolves with treatment
- Infertility may occur in mares as a result of altered hormone production
- Infections may occur more commonly in horses with PPID because some of the hormones released with the condition suppress the immune system

PPID is a natural degenerative condition and therefore there is nothing that can be done to prevent it. Early treatment with pergolide may slow the progression of the disease. Careful weight management earlier in life, however, will reduce the risk of EMS and the associated laminitis risk.

With good management there is no reason why horses with PPID cannot live a long and normal life and continue in normal work.

To claim a complimentary* diagnostic test for Equine Cushing's disease please contact your vet, or visit the following website for more information: careaboutcushings.co.uk

*Terms and conditions apply

Riding

Some senior horses can be ridden well into their 20s, if they are managed correctly.

If you are still riding your senior horse, discuss your riding plan with your vet, as they can advise you if they are able to safely do the work. The chances are your horse will at least benefit from some regular light exercise.

It can be a difficult decision to decide when the time is right to retire your senior horse. The most important points to consider are their health and whether staying in work is in their best interest.

If you have questions about what you might be able to do to help support your veteran horse in work or have concerns regarding retirement please discuss this with your vet.



Golden Oldies



Arthritis (Degenerative Joint Disease)

Arthritis (DJD) is a very common problem affecting many horses, especially senior horses. It can be a painful disease that causes inflammation within the joint and commonly affects hocks, pasterns, front fetlocks, and coffin joints although any joint may be affected.

DJD describes a process in the joint where the joint cartilage is progressively destroyed and changes occur in the associated bones and soft tissues.

Signs of DJD:

- Lameness
- Reluctance to work
- A change in behaviour
- Stiffness
- Muscle wastage
- Effusion (swelling) of the joints
- Reluctance to lift limbs for farrier

How to manage DJD:

- Managing the horse's weight is essential.
- If possible, gentle and regular exercise can be beneficial
- Regular turnout is important to keep your horse moving
- Good farriery is essential
- A joint supplement can help to manage DJD (ask your vet for advice on the best one)
- Anti-inflammatory drugs, prescribed by your vet, can help to reduce the pain
- Intra-articular medication (medications injected into the joint)
- Other systemic medications such as bisphosphonates or pentosan polysulphate

With appropriate medical treatment and management, many horses with DJD can continue to lead active lives.

**We hope you have found this information helpful in maintaining the health of your golden oldies?
If you have any questions or are concerned about your golden oldie,
please contact our practice on 01962 779111.**