

# *Equine Newsletter*

## *Winter 2007*

*Casselton Veterinary Service*

### **Winter Horse Care and Health**

Dr. R. D. Scoggins  
December 30, 1999

Horses, unlike ATVs, can't be put up on blocks for the winter just because they're not being used. Horse health care is a year-round process, and vaccination schedules, parasite control programs, and other care should be continued throughout the winter. Here are some reminders about horses's winter needs for good ventilation, nutrition, and exercise.

Fresh air and/or good ventilation are major requirements for horses. Judging from their own perception of what's comfortable, humans tend to close barns up too tightly. Horses can tolerate considerable cold if they can move around and are dry. Avoid drafts, but allow sufficient air exchange to move stale air, humidity, and ammonia out of the horse's environment.

Keeping stalls clean is necessary to keep ammonia levels low. Studies at the University of Illinois have shown that ammonia concentrates at about 18 inches above the surface of the bedding approximately where the horse's head is located when it lies down. This simply emphasizes the need to keep stalls cleaned regularly and not let manure packs build up if horses are enclosed for long periods.

Horses should be allowed outside where they have an area for adequate exercise and access to a run-in shed, free-choice quality hay, loose salt and minerals, and water heated to temperature of 60 degrees F. Horses that are not in competition need not be kept in a restrictive environment. Pull their shoes and trim their hooves regularly, every 6 weeks. Let their hair coat grow out if they are going to be turned out.

Most horses will not require grain if the hay is of good quality. Hay generates more heat than grain does during digestion and thus is more helpful in maintaining body heat during cold weather. The extra energy provided by grain may be needed to maintain normal weight if the horse has to navigate mud or deep snow.

Several studies have shown that warming water to at least 60 degrees F will increase water consumption by 40 percent to 100 percent. Dehydration (lack of water) is the number one cause of impaction colic in horses. Reduced water consumption due to cold weather combined with a diet of dry feed is a recipe for impaction colic. Warming the water is much more effective than feeding bran, linseed meal, or other so called laxative diets.

Attempting to maintain some level of physical fitness will decrease the time needed to get the horse in shape for the coming season. Riding for three times a week for an hour at a walk and trot will help maintain a baseline of physical fitness. Use this time to increase flexibility by doing suppling exercises at the walk and trot and eventually at the lope or canter. Increasing suppleness and fitness will reduce the incidence of lameness.

When working horses in cold weather, warm horses up slowly and thoroughly before asking for serious work. In cold weather most horses are more "cinchy" when being saddled, so be sure to move them before mounting. Avoid tying horses to saddle them; instead, teach them to stand on a loose lead rope to be saddled.

Hot horses need to be cooled out thoroughly then brushed to stand the hair up again before turning them back out. Fluffy hair traps air and keeps the horse warm; hair plastered down flat or wet lets body heat escape.

If you anticipate weather changes and adapt the work schedule, turnout schedule, and feeding programs accordingly, there is no reason not to enjoy your horses throughout the year.

R. D. Scoggins, D.V.M. Retired Equine Extension Veterinarian University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was written by Dr. R.D. Scoggins, who passed away in December 2006.

<http://www.cvm.uiuc.edu/ope/enotes/showarticle.cfn?id=21>

## Eyes

### **'WAIT AND SEE' WON'T WORK FOR EQUINE CORNEAL PROBLEMS**

by Dennis E. Brooks, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACVO

A corneal ulcer (ulcerative keratitis), is the most serious eye disease that veterinarians treat. Defined as a lesion in which the outer layer and some of the middle layer of the cornea have been lost, even simple ulcers can quickly progress to larger, more complicated ones if not diagnosed and treated promptly. A corneal ulcer can even lead to an infection of inner structures of the eye.

Corneal ulcers can be classified by their cause. There can be mechanical causes such as abrasions, foreign objects, or ingrown eyelashes. Some corneal ulcers are caused by infectious organisms like bacteria, fungi or viruses. If the horse has a paralyzed nerve on the face, he may not be able to blink properly or close the eye to protect it. There is even a disease where horses cannot make tears, causing the eyes to become dry and prone to damage.

**As an owner, you should contact your veterinarian immediately if your horse shows any of these signs:**

- Squinting
- Tearing
- Unable to tolerate bright sunlight
- A cloudy or blue eye
- A red, swollen eye

Your veterinarian will perform a complete ophthalmological examination of both of your horse's eyes, including staining the corneas to check for an ulcer. Abrasions to the cornea are often difficult to see without specific dyes, even with the proper lighting and equipment. Defects in the outer layer of the cornea allow the dye to diffuse into the middle layer, and appear bright, fluorescent green.

If the cornea takes up this stain, the next step is to determine how serious the ulcer is. A small, shallow defect that just appeared that day should heal rapidly with simple, straight-forward treatment. However, a deep or infected ulcer may need additional diagnostic tests and more aggressive treatment. Your veterinarian may need to take a culture of the eye and samples of affected eye tissue to look for infectious organisms or unusual white blood cells. Additional stains may also be required.

The goal of treatment is to remove the cause, prevent the eye from getting worse, and provide support to the eye while it heals. This support may include ointment for pain and a separate ointment for infection (NOT a steroid!). In the case of more serious ulcers, this medication may be given in liquid form through a tube sutured underneath the upper eyelid. Also, an eyelid flap or even contact lens may be used to cover and protect the defect while it heals.

Noticing that your horse has a problem with its eye is the most important step in healing corneal ulcers. The sooner that a diagnosis can be made and treatment started the better your horse's chances for a smooth recovery. Especially when treating eyes, it's best to let your veterinarian figure out what is wrong and prescribe the right medicine, since no medicine or the wrong medicine could cause permanent damage.

Dr Brooks, Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine in Gainesville, is a past President of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists, and an expert in the medical and surgical treatment of corneal diseases of the horse.

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We have three handy ways for you to enjoy our Equine Newsletter: 1) Call 701.347.5496 and ask us to add you to our postal mailing list; 2) we can send the newsletter to you via email; or 3) you may go to our webpage [www.cassvetservice.com](http://www.cassvetservice.com) and read it there. Thank you!

**\*\*Please visit our webpage for new changes to some of our Equine services, and learn why yearly equine wellness exams are so important.**

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## Western Saddle Fit

Does your horse buck, rear, or dance while being ridden? Is your horse refusing certain maneuvers like turning one direction, turning wide, refusing to stop, or back up? Does he pin his ears back, bite or kick at you when cinching up the saddle? Is there a lot of shifting of the weight on the hind legs or a shifting leg lameness problem that you can not locate? Is there a constant cracking of the front of the hoof, heel or sole bruises, or possibly unexplainable abscesses? Along with many muscle and skeletal problems, all of these are signs that you might notice if there is an improper saddle fit.

I am Abby Rohrbeck, and I am a Licensed Veterinary Technician who recently became a Western Saddle Fit Consultant for the Casselton Veterinary Service. Personally, I have struggled with improper saddle fit issues and have dealt with most of the signs that have arose due to improper saddle fit issues. Along with Dr. Bartholomay, we have seen many horses that are suffering with improper saddle fit. Dr. Bartholomay, DVM is a Veterinary Certified Animal Chiropractor, and belongs to the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society who at the Casselton Veterinary Service. He feels that 40% of his equine patients have problems due to saddle fit. Like everyone, I grew up thinking that any saddle should fit any horse. For instance, having an Arabian and a Quarter horse share a saddle and simply adding more padding to compensate the fit was the traditional way of thinking. This couldn't be more wrong. A saddle is like a pair of shoes, not every style or size will fit every horse and be comfortable. Over-padding is another problem that increases a poor saddle fit. When a person over pads their horse to add more "cushion", they are actually increasing the pressure points instead of dispersing the pressure. It's like having a shoe that rubs on you little toe, and you trying to help by adding a heavy sock to "cushion" the toe. In reality, it increases the pain because there is more pressure pushing on the toe, or like in the instance of the horse, the pressure becomes increased on the horse's back.

The tree is the most important factor of a saddle. If the tree is asymmetrical, or if it is broken, then the whole saddle is unusable. Some saddle makers say that they can fix a broken tree, but this only causes pressure points. In the end, buying a new saddle will be the cheaper way to go, due to vet, chiropractic, and massage bills, and the miracle liniments, supplements, feed, saddle blankets, and/or corrector pads. A saddle that has asymmetrical rigging or skirts can occasionally be repaired by a saddle maker. A person who rides competitively should not have a saddle with a crooked cantle or fork. However, if an owner of a crooked fork or cantle participates in pleasure riding once in awhile, then it will not cause much damage to the horse because they can heal, relax, and keep their muscles healthy. In contrast, people who compete and regularly exercise with an improper saddle fit will continue traumatizing the back, neck, and legs. This leads to soreness which will trigger behavioral and training problems. Also this will lead into refusals of certain maneuvers because the body is not able to function normally due to atrophy of the muscles, degenerative joint disease in multiple joints, and feet problems. Most of the bars have to be in contact with the horse to have a weight-bearing surface that is not greater than 2-3 pounds of weight per square inch. The length of the bars, the length of the skirts, the weight of the tree, and the weight of the rider will need to be considered when buying a saddle or finding a horse to match a saddle. A popular brand name or endorser does not necessarily means it's a good saddle. The difference between a good saddle and a bad saddle depends first on the tree maker and then the saddle maker.

What I do in my evaluations is as follows: 1) Evaluate your horse for any saddle fit issues and for pain, 2) Draw templates of the back to get an idea of the right size of a saddle for your horse, 3) Evaluate your saddle for any fatal flaws, 4) Evaluate the saddle on, with and without a saddle pad or blanket, and 5) Occasionally evaluate the rider on the horse. A full evaluation takes 2-2 1/2 hours, with additional time needed for each additional saddle brought in.

If you are interested in a saddle fit please call Casselton Veterinary Clinic at 701-347-5496, by 5 o'clock Tuesday through Friday's and ask for Abby to set up a consultation. I am looking forward to helping you and your horse get ready for a hurt free and fun summer.



***An educational presentation of saddle fit is scheduled for February 24, 2007 at 2:00 at the equine side ( south side) of the Casselton Veterinary Service Clinic. Please call and register before hand, due to limited seating. There will be cookies and refreshments provided.***

***I will be checking saddles for "fatal flaws" after the presentation for \$25. Reminder: checking for fatal flaws doesn't mean I can tell you that your saddle fits your horse, it means I am checking for symmetry of the bars, rigging and the skirts, and if the tree is stable.***

***Hope to see you there.***

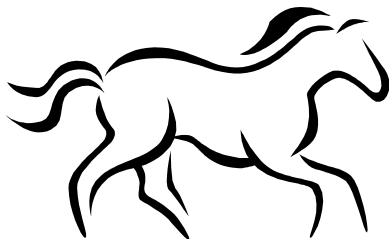
***Abby Rohrbeck***

## *Casselton Veterinary Service*

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## **First Aid Kit**

Here are some items that you may want to keep in your first aid kit. Keep your kit handy in your barn, trailer and keep handy for shows and trailrides.

- Absorbent quilted leg wraps and polo wraps, 4 of each
  - Roll cotton, 1#
  - Disposable diapers or sanitary napkins
  - Hand towels
  - Nonstick wound dressings (Telfa) , 6 of various sizes
  - Stretch gauze (Cling) 2 of each, 4" and 6"
  - Stretch bandage, 4– 4" rolls (Vetrap, Elasticon, Ace, Equisport)
  - Wound medications (triple antibiotic, nitrofurazone, Nolvasan)
  - Disposable washcloths
  - Duct tape
  - Phenylbutazone paste, 1– 12 gram tube
  - Banamine (paste or injectable)
  - Eye irrigation solution or sterile saline
  - Surgical scrub
  - \* Thermometer
  - \* Stethoscope
  - \* Halter and Lead rope
  - \* Lunge line
  - \* Twitch
  - \* Flashlight
  - \* Wirecutters
  - \* Scissors
  - \* 1" and 2" adhesive tape
  - \* Blankets
  - \* Variety of needles and syringes
  - \* Ice packs
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