



U of M Horse Newsletter

Providing research-based information to Minnesota Horse Owners

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FAQ Regarding Geriatric Horse Dental Care

The recent article on geriatric horse dental care has generated several questions. Below are responses to some frequently asked questions about this topic.

Is sedation safe for geriatric horses? Adequate sedation is crucial not only for a high quality float, but also for the safety of your horse and your veterinarian. Sedation in geriatric horses is generally safe, but it can be more difficult to achieve appropriate sedation due to the presence of chronic or painful dental conditions. The procedure may also take longer, which will influence the sedation protocol. One way to ensure that your veterinarian can use the lowest amount of sedation needed to perform their job safely and effectively is to establish routine dental care early in your horse's life. Not only will your horse be more comfortable with the procedure, but since every horse responds to sedative drugs differently, your veterinarian will know what combination of drugs works best for your horse.

Won't the speculum hurt my horse's jaw? A prolonged dental procedure can result in stress on the tempo-

mandibular joint (TMJ), which is especially common in geriatric horses. To avoid jaw discomfort, your veterinarian should only open the speculum wide enough to get the procedure done safely and effectively. If the procedure is prolonged, your veterinarian may give your horse's jaw a "break" and close the speculum for a short period of time before continuing. If your horse has been previously diagnosed with temporohyoid osteopathy (THO), ensure that your veterinarian knows this information, since additional care will be required when using the oral speculum.

Will my horse need pain medication after a dental procedure? There should be no pain or inflammation after a routine dental, so medications are not typically prescribed. If your horse has a prolonged or more invasive dental procedure, such as needing a tooth extraction, your veterinarian may prescribe a short course of a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug such as phenylbutazone.

For more information on geriatric horse dental care, click [here](#).

By: *Alex Bianco, MS, DVM,*
University of Minnesota

AHC's National Equine Economic Impact Study

Please do your part to make sure that horses remain a part of our future. You are invited to participate in a survey for the American Horse Council (AHC) Foundation's 2017 National Equine Economic Impact Study. This survey is specifically designed to capture the direct impact of front-line participants in the horse industry. The results of this survey will be used by the AHC to promote the economic benefits of the horse industry to policy makers. While this survey is not a horse census, the intent is to capture the economic impact from as many horses

in the country as possible. If you have received a survey invitation from multiple sources, please only respond once.

Depending upon the level of your involvement within the industry, the survey should take approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. Please have the following information readily available: 2016 revenue, capital expenditures, operating expenditures and employment. Please share this with all horse enthusiasts!

To complete the survey, please click [here](#).

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Upcoming Events

Minnesota Nutrition Conference

September 20-21, 2017
Mankato, MN
For program, lodging and registration information, click [here](#).

UMN Equine Center 10th Anniversary Horse Owner Education Program

October 21, 2017
10:00 am to 3:00 pm
UMN Equine Center
St. Paul, MN
\$25 per person
Registration required by October 18
Online registration available [here](#).

UMN Equine Center 10th Anniversary Youth Horse Owner Extravaganza

November 4, 2017
10:00 am to 3:00 pm
UMN Equine Center
St. Paul, MN
\$25 per person
Registration required by November 1
Online registration available [here](#).

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Geriatric Horse Care: Osteoarthritis

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This is the second of three articles dedicated to the topic of veterinary care and management of the geriatric horse. This article is dedicated to the management of osteoarthritis (OA).

Osteoarthritis is an inflammatory condition that can affect one or more joints and causes progressive and irreversible deterioration of the articular cartilage with concurrent changes to the bone and soft tissue. As an inflammatory process, the primary manifestation of OA in your horse will be joint pain and swelling. The cause of OA in a given joint is likely due to a combination of factors such as athletic history, trauma, conformation, and genetic predisposition. While the natural proclivities of horses allow them to excel in a variety of disciplines, they also subject them to repetitive stress or trauma to their joints that can ultimately result in OA.

Many horses are diagnosed with lameness due to OA early in life, but virtually all geriatric horses will have OA in at least one joint due to the progressive nature of the disease and the increased lifespan of the modern horse. In 2011, a survey of horse owners in the United Kingdom found that 72% of horses ≥ 15 years old had osteoarthritis.

If your geriatric horse is diagnosed with OA, the first thing to know is that the goal for a horse with OA is not to cure the condition but to develop a multifactorial treatment plan that provides the horse with a high quality, low-pain life. The key things you can do to help manage OA in your geriatric horse are monitoring your horse's pain level, keeping your horse active, keeping your horse fit, providing a safe environment, and using appropriate supplements.

How your horse manifests pain

will depend on the location and severity of the OA along with your horse's individual pain tolerance. Ask your veterinarian to help you develop a method to assess your horse's comfort level. Your horse may seem to have good and bad days. Try to monitor what seems to make your horse more or less painful, such as changes in the weather or a certain activity.

Many geriatric horses with OA can still be ridden and typically do best with a consistent activity level. Sudden changes in activity level, whether increased or decreased, can cause exacerbation of OA. Make any changes in your exercise routine gradually and monitor your horse for any change in pain level.

Obesity is one of the biggest detriments to the management of joint pain. Horses with OA should be kept at a body condition score of 4 or 5 out of 9 to decrease the load on each joint. Your veterinarian or nutrition professional can help you assess your horse's body condition and develop a nutrition plan.

In general, the harder the footing, the more it will exacerbate your horse's OA. Avoid using concrete in locations where your horse will be standing for long periods of time. Your veterinarian or farrier may recommend special orthopedic shoeing depending on your horse's condition. Provide a safe environment for lying down and sleeping. Horses must lie down to have a restful sleep and horses with OA may be reluctant to lie down because it is harder for them to stand up quickly. In the pasture, horses are reluctant to lie down if they do not have another horse "standing guard," so ensure your geriatric horse has at least one companion.

There are a multitude of

supplements that claim to help with OA. However, there is no governmental regulation of these products, very few have been scientifically proven to work and many do not contain the ingredients they claim. Glucosamine and chondroitin are ingredients that have been shown to help in management of OA in horses. Omega-3 fatty acids are natural anti-inflammatories that can be found in products such as flaxseed or fish oil. Consult with your veterinarian or nutrition professional on specific supplements before adding them to your horse's diet.

Successful management of OA requires a working partnership with your veterinarian. While the management techniques listed above should be considered the backbone of OA management, horses will often benefit from more targeted local therapy such as joint injections or surgery. Systemic treatment with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) is common practice in management of OA. Products include flunixin meglumine (e.g. Banamine), phenylbutazone, or firocoxib (Equioxx[®] or Previcox[®]). However, all NSAIDs can have serious side effects when used at high or prolonged doses. During an acute "flare up" of OA pain, a short course (3-5 days) of NSAIDs at a prescribed dose is appropriate and should be safe. Because it is considered safer than other NSAIDs, daily use of firocoxib is becoming increasingly common. However, firocoxib can still cause side effects such as gastric or colonic ulcers and kidney failure. Daily NSAID use should only be used in horses that have a poor quality of life despite addressing all other aspects of OA management. Please consult with your veterinarian on the appropriate use of NSAIDs.