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Equine Cushing's Disease (ECD)

Equine Cushing's Disease, also known as Pars Pituitary Intermediary Dysfunction (PPID) or "Cushing's", is a common condition of middle aged to older horses and ponies. It is caused by an increase in the size and function of the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain. The growth is not usually a tumour but an increase in the number and size of cells in the middle part of the pituitary gland. These cells over produce a variety of hormones that act to cause the clinical signs of the disease. There is also increased cortisol production from the adrenal glands.

Horses and ponies of any age can develop ECD but it is more common in horses and ponies over the age of 15 years. Some of the signs of this disease are:

- Weight loss but a 'pot' belly forming
- Long, curly hair coat that doesn't shed properly in spring (hirsutism)
- Increased sweating (hyperhidrosis)
- Increased drinking and urination (polydipsia and polyuria)
- Increased predisposition to laminitis
- Increased breathing and lethargy/reduced exercise tolerance
- Increased predisposition to infections

Any or all of these signs can develop and some occur on their own without any other signs. This photo is of a pony with 'classic' signs of ECD.



Because ECD can cause laminitis it is potentially a very serious disease. It can be diagnosed by clinical appearance of the horse in very advanced cases, but in early cases your vet will need to perform a blood test to diagnose the disease.

Treatment involves a daily oral medication called pergolide, plus management of laminitis if this is occurring. Some horses need to have their long hair coat clipped to prevent overheating in summer, however the medication is usually very effective in reducing the clinical signs of the disease.

To make an appointment for your horse, or to get more information, please call us on 9739 5244.