



Lilydale Clinic
484 Maroondah Highway
Lilydale VIC 3140
P (03) 9739 5244 F (03) 9735 5509

Yarra Glen Clinic
28 Bell Street Yarra Glen VIC 3775
P (03) 9730 1569

www.yarrarangesvet.com.au
clinic@yarrarangesvet.com.au

EQUINE GASTRIC ULCER SYNDROME (EGUS)

Gastric ulcers are a common and troublesome problem in horses of all ages. Ulcers occur in 3 main age groups of horses:

- 1) Foals: Young foals are susceptible to gastric ulcers anytime they are unwell or are on medication. Foals tend to show more dramatic signs of pain than adult horses, including teeth grinding, rolling and lying on their back.
- 2) Weanlings and yearlings: These young horses are more susceptible to pyloric and proximal duodenal ulcers (first part of the small intestine) and as such will show signs of gastric obstruction, including lying down, not eating and refluxing their stomach contents.
- 3) Adult horses: Can develop ulcers in both the squamous (top, unprotected) and glandular (bottom, better protected) parts of their stomach. Signs vary immensely in terms of severity and presentation. The rest of this article will refer to the disease in adult horses.

Horses are more susceptible to ulcers if they have been unwell or on medications, in particular anti-inflammatories (such as 'bute'). Horses are also at risk if they are nervous/stressed, in heavy work or stabled a lot, eating a high grain/carbohydrate diet or are ex- racehorses. One study recently performed showed that 100% of stabled racehorses in training will suffer from gastric ulcers to some degree.

Clinical signs of ulcers vary and can include:

- Colic (rolling, pawing, kicking at belly) especially after eating
- Eating grass and hay but refusing to eat hard feed
- Weight loss
- Poor coat condition
- Being 'girthy', trying to paw or bite when the girth is done up, especially if this is new behaviour for this horse
- Diarrhoea
- Irritable behaviour

The only way to diagnose ulcers definitively is to perform a gastroscopy (put a camera into the stomach), however a clinical exam is essential and blood testing can be useful to rule out other diseases. Treatment involves diet modification and antacid medications such as omeprazole. Diet changes include making sure that your horse has continual access to food (grass and/or hay) plus ensuring that the roughage (hay/chaff) component of your horse's diet is adequate. Reducing the carbohydrate (grain) component and using protein or fat to provide a source of energy instead will help too. If you think that your horse has ulcers it is important to talk to your vet to make sure that nothing else is wrong and to get your horse on appropriate medication, as untreated ulcers are painful and a potentially serious condition.