

newsletter

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B L E N D I N G N A T U R E A N D T E C H N O L O G Y



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Wishing all our Loyal Customers a very Happy New Year.

## BACK AND NECK PROBLEMS IN THE HORSE

*So you have been away on your long December break and now is the time for a fresh start as far as your training is concerned. With owners being eager to get back into the swing of things, sometimes back and neck issues can be overlooked. Below are a few pointers to assist in recognising such problems in your horse to ensure an injury free start to your training.*

### Neck problems

Neck problems can range from being extremely obvious to simply presenting as "poor performance". Quite often they are also secondary issues resulting from something much larger (for example a lameness issue in another area). Neck problems can occur in any breed, age, gender but recent studies have shown that the prevalence is higher in performance breeds such as the Warmblood. Also, horses involved in heavy competition work, particularly dressage, experience more neck issues.

Neck issues can be split into three groups:

- 1. Pain and/or Reduced movement.** This includes neck pain, restricted mobility, abnormal head and neck carriage, inability to perform certain postures, for example, collection. The picture to the right shows a horse who, in order to eat from the floor, needs to "scissor" his front limbs. Repeat presentation of this stance can indicate a neck problem.
- 2. Hindlimb Ataxia.** You can't quite put your finger on it, but your horse's gait just doesn't look right. It is not something that you can clearly see, but the horse looks/feels off. Is he lame, or is this something else? 'Ataxia' is a Greek term that means 'inconsistent'. Ataxic horses are those that are unable to control the rate, range, or force of their movements resulting in an inconsistent gait. Most owners wouldn't normally associate this with a neck issue and thus sometimes these problems can be missed. Your vet, however, will be able to help diagnose this category of neck problem and assess whether it is neck related or a problematic gait due to other issues.
- 3. Forelimb Lameness.** This is the most uncommon group and can be associated with injury to the neck. Areas such as the brachial plexus, a web of nerves on the inside of the shoulder, may be involved. These nerves are responsible for supplying all the muscles of the forelimb. This can be caused by a trauma to the horse's neck and shoulder, for example in a collision with a car, or dramatic fall during Cross Country.



## Back problems

With back problems a full history is vital as more often than not signs of back issues can be very varied and vague.

Once again signs are often noted more as "poor performance" than anything specific. Back pain can either be a primary issue or, again, a secondary issue related to something further afield.

The range of back pain signs is quite large but can include:

- Bucking; rearing;
- A horse not "using himself";
- A lack of hind-end engagement;
- Being cold-backed - discomfort after saddling can indicate a back issue even when it seems to resolve after a few minutes of work;
- Girthiness;
- Refusing to collect;
- Shying;
- Biting or nipping;
- Blanketing or brushing issues
- White hairs in the saddle region;
- Farrier complaints;
- Saddle fit issues;
- Difficulty with flying lead changes;
- Twisting over fences;
- Refusing or rushing fences;
- Stumbling or tripping;
- Shoulder asymmetry, in which one shoulder appears more developed than the other;
- Muscle atrophy (wasting) over the topline, resulting in prominent spinal processes;
- Holding the tail to one side

Common Conditions which cause back pain are vast but can include:

- Kissing Spines
- Fractures
- Muscular disorders
- Arthritis
- Poor saddle fit
- Forelimb lameness
- Poor core strength

## Conclusion

With cases of neck and back pain it will be essential to provide your vet with a full clinical history in order for them to establish if the issue is a primary or secondary one. Often treatment will be a mixture of initial medication to reduce pain and long term therapy which can include physiotherapy exercises, massage, magnetic therapy, and even water treadmills. Both these issues can lead to long term problems and thus any persistent signs of discomfort or "not feeling right" should be investigated no matter how mild.

*Information taken from:*

*<https://www.thewebinarvet.com/webinar/a-practical-approach-to-back-and-neck-conditions-of-the-horse>.*

*Hosted by Dr Jessica Kid*



## FEEDING HORSES ON BOX REST

All horse owners dread a veterinary diagnosis that requires a horse to be placed on box rest. Confinement of any horse for long periods poses many obstacles, especially where their diet is concerned. The equine diet plays an important role in a horse's behaviour and overall gastrointestinal health. Not implementing a proper feeding program for a horse on box rest can be worse than the injury itself.

Whether the horse is a hard working racehorse or a weekend pleasure horse, box rest means a serious reduction in his usual amount of activity—voluntary and otherwise. Depending on his level of work prior to the injury, his total calorie intake will need to be reduced to account for the decrease in activity.

There are two main calorie sources in a horse's diet: carbohydrates and fats. Carbohydrates are further divided into two types: Structural and Non-structural. Horses receive structural carbs from the fibre found in hay and pasture. The Non-structural carbs come mainly from cereal grains, and include sugar and starch. Fats, such as vegetable oils, contain approximately 2.5 times the calories of carbohydrates and are made up of long chains of fatty acids. The question is, thus, what calories should be cut from the diet first during stall rest?

- 1. Keep the fibre** Fibre provides the horse with more than just calories. Studies have shown that when horses are fed less than 1% of their body weight per day in fibre, they are more prone to develop unwanted behavioural vices. Fibre, particularly in the form of long-stemmed hay, reduces boredom and stress and slows intake time. Thus, ensure the horse is consuming, at the very minimum, 1% of his body weight in fibre per day. Providing adequate fibre will also help to maintain digestive wellbeing, helping you to reduce the risk of colic and gastric ulcers.
- 2. Choosing the right calorie source** is key to maintaining a horse's condition without creating behaviour vices. There is evidence that fat and fibre are more suitable calorie sources than Non-structural carbs (sugars and starches, including concentrate bucket feed). Look for feeds with highly digestible fibre sources (e.g., beet pulp, soy hulls), added fat, and low sugar and starch levels. This will help to provide calories in a cool and calm fashion.
- 3. Weight management** For horses needing to gain or lose weight, stall rest presents an opportunity to do so. This can be achieved by making simple, gradual changes to the horse's diet and monitoring his body condition score. Methods used to reduce weight include decreasing the Non-structural carbohydrate (i.e. reducing the concentrate food) and fat portion of the diet while increasing forage intake. At the same time, ensure the diet is still meeting the horse's other nutrient requirements (protein, vitamins, and minerals); simply reducing the amount of grain fed might not be ideal. Consider using a ration balancer for horses prone to weight gain in order to reduce calories without compromising these nutrients.

### Other considerations

- 1. Feed often** When on box rest a horse should never be left for long periods without anything to chew. Saliva, which is high in bicarbonate and is only produced by the act of chewing food, helps to buffer the stomach's acidic secretions. Therefore, longer time between meals increases the horse's risk for gastric ulcer formation. Roughage should be fed ad lib, and not only helps to alleviate boredom but can help

## TESTIMONIALS

Dear Equus

I am currently using the **Equus Cool and Perform 12 %** and I just wanted to let you know that I feel this food has been far superior to any other food I have used for my horse. My horse has calmed down quite substantially since making the move to Equus and has become much more settled. He has also started to bulk up nicely and the food is doing everything I require it to do. My horse has also had the required energy for 6 days of schooling. His coat has even started getting a nice sheen to it, even though he is a grey and we know how difficult a grey's coat is to keep.

I thank you for a great product

Yours sincerely

*Jess McDowall*



Dear Equus

I just wanted to write in and let you know how my horse has done on your **Equus Lucerne Cubes**. After discovering he has a grain intolerance issue, I decided to change him onto the Equus Lucerne Cubes and he has never done better! I love them! My horse loves them! He is even getting something approaching a topline now and is filling out along his back! This is a wonderful product!

Thank you

*Kate Armstrong – Cape Town*



reduce the risk of gastric ulcers and colic. Concentrate meals should be fed regularly. Little and often is the key here, with no more than 2kg being fed at each meal.

- 2. Try to mimic foraging behaviour** Grazing horses usually consume grass constantly during turnout, so it is important to mimic this as closely as possible while on box rest. Krishona Martinson, PhD, associate professor and equine Extension specialist at the University of Minnesota, suggests using a slow-feed haynet to extend foraging time. "Our research shows that horses consuming a hay meal from the stall floor take 3.4 hours compared to 6.5 hours when the same hay meal is fed from a slow-feed haynet," she says. If a haynet is not available, feed hay in small meals throughout the day.
- 3. If at all possible include some light activity/movement** Researchers have found evidence that reduced or restricted locomotion can decrease a horse's gastrointestinal motility—the movement of food through the digestive tract. "Decreased physical activity results in decreased gut motility, and this can predispose a horse to impaction colic". Keeping a horse moving, even if this is minimal, can help.
- 4. Keep the water flowing** The hindgut is the predominant place for water absorption, so impaction colic can occur in horses accustomed to ingesting and obtaining a fair amount of their daily fluid requirements from grass. Hay has a much lower moisture content, significantly decreasing the amount of fluid available for the large colon to absorb. So although horses on box rest might be drinking as much as they usually do from their water buckets, their fluid intake is still considerably lower than usual so take care to ensure that the horse is getting water at every opportunity. This can include soaking the roughage, soaking the concentrate feed, and if possible taking the horse out to graze in hand. Remind all those in charge of caring for the horse that his bucket will need to be filled more often than normal if he has no access to other water sources.

## Conclusion

Managing horses on stall rest can be a daunting task that requires careful diet planning for gut health. Mimic the horse's natural behaviour by feeding small, frequent meals and/or using a slow-feed haynet. Feeding highly digestible fibre sources and, if necessary, fat for calorie sources will reduce the horse's chance of developing behavioural vices and digestive upset.

Article adapted from <http://www.thehorse.com/articles/36961/feeding-horses-on-stall-rest>



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*For an absolutely free consultation with no further obligation contact our professional consultants to schedule a visit to your yard.*

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