

April 2025 Newsletter

Joint Health



01297304007

It is a sad fact of life that are equine companions become older. It is important to look after them as best we can both for their welfare and for their long-term athletic ability. A major part of that is their joint health. When considering joint health, we are talking about not just their joints in their limbs but also their back, necks and jaw as all joints can sadly deteriorate.

There are lots of ways to improve and maintain joint health including:

- Cross training to alter the stresses and strain on your horse's joints and to help build fitness evenly
- Carrot stretching to improve mobility through your horse's neck and back
- Warming your horse up at the start of the session and cooling it down
- Letting your horse stretch long and low at end of each session
- Pole work to help build fitness and improve mobility
- Hill work to help build fitness and improve mobility
- Slowly improving fitness levels to reduce the risk of trauma
- Have regular turn out to encourage mobility
- Good regular farriery and foot care- this doesn't mean horses have to be shod it just means they should be trimmed or shod appropriately to keep them balanced and to try and correct any conformational issues to prevent unnecessary strain on joints
- Good nutrition especially for young horses including not over feeding them to try and get them to grow at a steady rate

How to recognise you may have a joint problem:

- Lameness
- Swelling over a joint
- Reduction in mobility
- Stiffness
- Difficulty on transitions for example struggling to get the correct leg canter transitions
- Pain response, for example not wanting its hind legs picked up for the farrier

If your horse is lame, then the gold standard is to perform a lameness work up. To diagnose where the horse is painful local blocks and joint injections are used. The joints affected with are then imaged with either x-rays or ultrasound (or both) to identify the extent of the damage to the joint.

Osteoarthritis is a common joint disease where the cartilage within the joint has started to break down resulting in bone changes within that joint. It has been attributed to 60% of lameness's!

Steroids, polymers or stem cells can be injected directly into painful joints, they can help keep the horse more comfortable for months to years.

Things to avoid:

- Cantering on hard ground
- Working your horse continuously on the same surface all the time, for example always schooling in an arena every time you ride
- Jumping every ridden session
- Repeatedly working on the same movement over again, for example focusing solely on leg yielding throughout a schooling session
- Excessive trotting on roads
- Horse becoming overweight
- Excessive lunging and working on circles



Remedial farriery may also assist by helping to support the horse's conformation or reducing pressure on different structures.

Here at Summerleaze we can examine, radiograph and ultrasound horses out on yards without mains electricity. We also routinely medicate horses out on yards if there is a clean, well lit, quiet safe area to do so. However, we strongly recommend lameness work ups to come into the practice as we have a designated enclosed hard trot up area, an enclosure specifically surfaced lunging area and purposely designed treatment rooms, as well as fantastic nurses to assist.

In older horses with arthritic joints long term NSAIDS are often used to reduce both pain and inflammation. This is particularly useful for horses with multiple joints affected.

The most important way of maintaining joint health is your long-term upkeep of your horse and by the work your horse does.

It is incredibly important to slowly build up your horse's soft tissue structures to help their joints. We often will recommend exercise plans when we have medicated joints to try to ensure the joints are well supported. Hill work, pole work and hydrotherapy can be crucial for this depending on which joints are involved. Physiotherapy may also be recommended.

EASTER

The office will be closed from 5pm on Thursday 17th April until 8am on Tuesday 22nd April 2025.

Please leave plenty of time to order long term medication.

During the Easter break we have dedicated Equine Vets on call for emergencies. If you are worried enough to think you may need a vet, then please call, we would rather speak to you, or see your equine friend if you are concerned. **01297304007**