

August 2024 Tying up and heat stroke

Tying up is one of the conditions that we often treat at equestrian events. It is also known as Equine exertional rhabdomyolysis. It is a condition that damages muscle tissue and can be linked to over feeding carbohydrates, electrolyte/mineral imbalances, sudden increase in workload, working a horse after a period of rest and can even potentially be impacted by the weather.

This condition occurs when there is insufficient blood supply to the muscles and as a result the muscles begin to function anaerobically producing harmful waste products. Signs of this condition can include stiffness, reluctance to move, sweating, increased respiratory or heart rate, weight shifting, inability to stand or producing red to brown urine. It can be quite alarming and present with the horse completely refusing to move.

Treatment typically includes the use of nonsteroidals, box rest and dietary change. Massaging the horse may be recommended and potentially gentle in hand walking. In severe cases fluids are needed to prevent kidney damage. In cases of tying up, blood may be taken to measure the horse's CK and AST levels which are enzymes that can indicate muscle damage to help guide treatment and length of rest needed. The severity of the episode will impact the length of the time the horse will need to be rested after it. We may need to repeat these bloods multiple weeks after the episode to ensure the horse recovered well.

To try to prevent your horse tying up it is important to ensure they have a balanced diet of mostly forage, that your horse is slowly built up to gain fitness and that you properly warm up your horse and cool it down after each ride, particularly if you are undertaking hard work. Ensuring your horse also has the correct electrolyte input is also essential for harder work.



In the weeks post a tying up episode, physio can be useful to help make the horse more comfortable. However, it is important this is done once your vet gives you permission to do so, if the horse's muscles are still at risk of deteriorating, they need to be rested and your physio must be aware of what has happened.

01297304007

Heat Stroke

Signs that your horse may be suffering from the heat include:

- Lethargy
- Fast, shallow breathing
- Nostril flaring
- Increased rectal temperature
- Decreased appetite and thirst
- Dark urine and potentially reduced urination
- Reduced performance
- Dark mucous membranes
- Muscle spasms
- “Thumps” (synchronous diaphragmatic flutter). Their sides move very oddly.
- Irregular heart rhythm
- Slow recovery after exercise
- Ataxia-being unsteady on their feet
- Collapse



If you think your horse may be suffering from heat exhaustion, move your horse into the shade (if it's safe to do so) and start to cool by pouring large amounts of water all over the body either with a bucket or a hose. Do not scrape the water off, just apply more water, this will help to cool them faster. You may need to do this continuously for 10-15 minutes before you start to see any improvement. It can take more than an hour to get their temperature down so keep going!

Severe heat stroke/heat exhaustion can lead to further problems including renal failure, liver failure, myopathy (muscle damage), laminitis and can be fatal if not treated promptly.

Remember in the good weather to make sure your horse has access to clean, fresh water and if you must ride, try to do so earlier or later in the day or go slower. If needed it may also be worth clipping your horse if they still have a thick coat. If your horse suffers from a summer related asthma, then it may be advisable to avoid working them at all, in the heat. For those horses with pink skin it is also advisable to either use sun block/fly rug and sheet or to stable during the times of the day when the sun is at its strongest.

Practice News

In September a team from the practice are taking on the 3 peaks challenge: the highest mountains in Scotland, England and Wales. Emelie, Bryony and Stuart will be climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon within a 24-hour period and they really need your support. They are raising money for charity, please donate following the links on our Facebook page.

Did you know that the World horse welfare does a lot of educational work? As part of this, Stuart was asked to speak on a webinar on equine dentistry. The 5th of July sees the launch of the WHW “Horses Explained” series; check out Stuart’s part in the 9th of August episode on <https://youtu.be/1Ww1iadDa3w?si=Shs0hSUa2Ju2H0gZ>