



June 2024 Obesity and Laminitis

It is thought well over 50% of our leisure horses and ponies are obese. This seriously compromises welfare with a direct link to laminitis and increased strain on joints, tendons, ligaments and all the body organs.

Prior to domestication horses would be walking miles daily grazing, usually pregnant or with a foal at foot. Spring and summer would provide periods of abundant grass to prepare for the leaner times over winter.

Domestication and the care we provide to our horses means that the seasonal weight loss over winter does not happen. This means weight may start to creep up over several years.

Particularly at this time of year, sugar and starch levels in grass can be very high. As a result, we often see cases of laminitis at this time of the year. Changes to grazing management such as grazing muzzle, track systems and strip grazing can be required to achieve weight loss or even maintenance. We need to be careful to avoid 'binge' behaviour-ponies can consume many daily calories in an incredibly short time period!

Every situation is different so we're always happy to advise on individually tailored plans and guide to appropriate resources. Give us a call at the clinic to discuss.

Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS) These horses commonly have excess fat storage over their body and become insulin resistant. If you have already been working hard on weight loss and not been successful, this is worth considering. This condition can be diagnosed with an overnight fasting blood test after a high glucose meal and management tailored accordingly.

It is our responsibility as horse owners to be honest about our horse's waistlines. Having a way of quantifying and measuring their weight helps monitoring progress much easier. We have a weighbridge at Summerleaze that is available for our clients to use free of charge. Weigh tapes can also provide a cheap and easy way to measure.

Our vets and nurses are always happy to advise on your horse's body condition scores.

Ultimately weight loss can only be achieved by decreasing calories consumed and increasing calories used up.

The exercise aim should be to build up to at least 20-30minutes of sweaty exercise every other day.

Make use of their metabolism by not over rugging.

Nutrition should prioritise fibre intake for 'fullness' and reduce sugar intake.

Reduce supplementary feeding with the use of a multi vitamin supplement if appropriate. Hay can be soaked to reduce sugar and starch levels.



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What should I do if I suspect my horse has laminitis?

Sudden onset of Laminitis is urgent. Prompt attention and treatment as soon as the signs are recognised are important to help alleviate pain and reduce any long-term damage. It is important to seek veterinary attention. While waiting for the vet, remove from pasture, provide deep bedding and ensure they can reach food (soaked hay) and water. 90% of laminitis cases are caused by hormonal conditions so it is important that these are tested for.

What are the signs of laminitis?

Laminitis is an extremely painful inflammatory condition of the delicate laminae in the hoof.

They will be very uncomfortable often leaning back on their heels, trying to take the weight off their front feet. In severe cases, animals will be unable to move and if very severe they may lie down to take the weight off their feet completely, often, this can be mistaken for colic.

More commonly, milder case signs can include:

- Increased pulses to the feet (where the digital artery runs over the fetlock).
- Heat in the hooves.
- Pain on pressure of the sole.
- Leaning backwards to take the weight off their front feet.
- Pottery or short striding gait, weight shifting.
- Signs of abnormal hoof growth: hoof rings wider at the heel.
- Resistant to walking forwards.
- Lying down more than normal.

How can we treat it?

Emergency treatment includes pain relief, restricting movement and supporting the foot to reduce the risk of pedal bone movement. Longer term treatment will address the painful symptoms and possibly include changes to farriery and management. Often x-rays of your horse's feet can be helpful to assess the extent of the problem and enable the farrier to make any necessary corrections. It is also important to treat the underlying cause of the laminitis not just the signs themselves.

How can we prevent laminitis?

It is important to remember that laminitis is a multi-factorial problem. It is important to identify any underlying conditions, including Equine Cushing's Disease, which is seen more often in older horses and ponies, although not exclusively. It is due to an enlargement of the pituitary gland at the base of the brain. This causes high levels of circulating ACTH and other hormones that can lead to laminitis. Please do talk to us about our Cushing's Club to sign up for cheaper medication and ACTH tests. If you have any questions about laminitis please ring us on 01297304007, also take a look at our Summerleaze Vets YouTube link ([ps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MD6OIVAsLk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MD6OIVAsLk)) where we explain how to feel for digital pulses.

Please join us at our client evening on 10th July 7pm for 7.30pm start on Poor Performance. Focusing on gastric ulcers and orthopaedic issues, particularly backs and necks. At Curland Equestrian TA35SD. Please RSVP to summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk or 01297304007