

VET DIARY



OUR EXPERT
Nicola Thompson is a qualified vet who works for Wright & Moreton in Cheshire, a member practice of XL Equine. She has ridden since she was a child.

A long road to recovery

Tendon injuries are common and can be caused in the field or under saddle. Our vet columnist Nicola Thompson discusses diagnosis, treatment and recovery

As a horsewoman and a vet I have experience of tendon injuries from both sides. I have nursed my own horses through injury and now I help others to get their horses back on track.

The tendons I want to talk about are the superficial and deep flexor tendons, which run down the back of the leg.

The flexor tendons have a role in supporting the fetlock joint. Due to their elastic properties they also provide energy efficient movement.

Tendons can be injured in two ways. Firstly, a strain can be caused by overextension of the foreleg. The other type of injury is a wound involving a tendon.

Flexor tendon injuries are common in racehorses, particularly as they commonly over-extend their legs at gallop. My case example, however, is not a racehorse

Scanning and therapy

Ultrasound scans are useful in tendon injuries and enable us to identify exactly which structure is damaged. They also help monitor improvement.

However, scans can be misleading if done too early because the initial injury can look different in its first stages. It may look bigger than it actually is.

I left it for a week before scanning Mimi's leg, when I found 'core lesion' in the mare's superficial flexor tendon.

This appears as a black area in the centre of the tendon, where the fibres that make up the tendon are broken and the space has filled with fluid.

I measured the area and advised that Mimi stayed on box rest with pain relief.

We also started a course of shockwave therapy, to stimulate healing in the tendon.



of re-injury is building up exercise too fast while the scar tissue is forming and remodelling. Turnout can be a risk as it is uncontrolled.

Six months on from her injury, Mimi is doing well. Her owner has been working hard doing lots of strengthening and conditioning work to help prevent another injury. Hopefully, she will be back competing this season.

Her owners will have to be careful as the scar tissue in Mimi's tendon is not as elastic or strong as the original fibres it has replaced.

Tendon injuries involve a long road to recovery and rushing can set you back a long way. But there are ways to help the healing and depending on the injury, a full recovery is possible. ■

NEXT ISSUE Nicola talks about tetanus and the importance of vaccination against this often fatal condition.

"Mimi suddenly went lame during a cross-country schooling session"

but a 10-year-old Pony Club eventer called Mimi.

While at a cross-country schooling session, Mimi suddenly went lame on her right fore. Her owner hosed her leg but couldn't find any wounds.

As Mimi could walk fairly well, they transported her home and gave me a call.

When I arrived, there was already swelling of the tendon and Mimi was painful in that area.

I suspected a tendon strain so I advised box rest and prescribed non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

A steady return to work

Mimi had a repeat scan after six weeks and showed good progress, with the core lesion becoming smaller and forming scar tissue.

We continued box rest and looked forward to starting her on an exercise plan.

Exercise plans are tailored to each condition and the individual horse, but consist of a slowly increasing duration of walk exercise, before gradually introducing trot.

The aim is help strengthen the tendon without over-exerting it. The highest risk