

# Q&A

HORSECARE

## OUR EXPERT PANEL



**IMOGEN BURROWS**  
Imogen graduated from the Royal Veterinary College in 2000. She works at Cliffe Equine in East Sussex. Her interests include internal medicine.



**LAURENCE PEARMAN**  
Laurence is a master saddler and former president of the Society of Master Saddlers. He works at Cirencester Saddlery in Gloucestershire.



**CLARE BARFOOT**  
Clare is a registered equine nutritionist and research and development manager for Spillers. She has a specialist knowledge of laminitis. Visit: [www.spillers-feeds.com](http://www.spillers-feeds.com).

## Could she have worm damage?

**Q** I have a rescue horse and I'm worried she had a high worm burden as a youngster. What problems could this have caused, and is there any way of telling?

*Name and address withheld*

**IMOGEN SAYS** Long-term worm infestation can be associated with gut wall damage.

However, not all horses that haven't been wormed will have high parasite burdens.

There is an 80/20 rule which suggests four out of five horses carry 20 per cent of the worm burden within an equine population.

Therefore only one in five horses are predisposed to a high burden, so the odds are in your favour.

Worm egg counts will help to identify if she has grazed a very contaminated pasture, but won't reflect tapeworm burdens.



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A blood test is available to measure tapeworm exposure. The results of this will dictate whether it is best to treat your mare for tapeworm once or twice a year.

Horses with intestinal damage may lose weight, look poor and have intermittent or persistent diarrhoea.

If this is the case you should arrange for further evaluation by your vet.

## Age concern

**Q** I have bought a new horse and I'm suspicious she is younger than stated in her passport. Would my vet be able to help me work out her real age?

*Leanna Smith, by email*

**IMOGEN SAYS** Ageing by dentition is an inexact science, but the younger a horse is, the more accurate the estimation.

Eruption times of incisors, premolars and molars are well documented and are reasonably reliable markers.

In addition, other changes on the teeth can be identified, which will provide information on the horse's age.

These changes include the shape of the table of the lower incisors; the shape and presence of the infundibulum (the tooth's funnel-like centre) and dental star; the length of the corner incisor; and the appearance, extent and position of Galvayne's groove.



A horse's teeth can help determine their age

As well as examining the teeth, the overall appearance of a horse (for example, whether there are grey hairs around the eyes and muzzle, the length of tail and overall body proportions) can help us estimate age.

## A diet for an ulcer sufferer

**Q** I have an eventer who has suspected ulcers. Is there anything I can feed him to help resolve the issue?

*Sal Walker, by email*

**CLARE SAYS** Gastric ulcers are caused by many factors, including stress, lack of fibre in the diet, high cereal feeds, long periods without food and intense exercise.

Although changing your horse's diet can help manage your eventer's condition, it may not be the complete solution.



Chopped fibre encourages chewing, which increases the production of saliva

An endoscopy examination will reveal any visible lesions. If he does have ulcers he will need to be treated medically.

Dietary changes that can help reduce the ongoing risk include not leaving a horse longer than four-six hours without forage and choosing feeds that are low in cereal starch and high in fibre and oil.

Chopped fibre encourages chewing, which increases the production of saliva that can help buffer excess acid in the stomach.

Feeding forage before fast work will help form a fibre mat on top of the stomach. The corrosive acid is then less likely to splash up on to the unprotected upper portion of the stomach, where it can start to form an ulcer.



Good doers don't need more food for extra energy

## Energy for increased exercise

**Q** I would love to do some cross-country on my cob, but he's a good doer and doesn't get a lot of food. Should I give him hard feed to provide energy for competing?

*Lesley Morris, Shrewsbury, Shrops*

**CLARE SAYS** It is a common myth that just because you want to do more work with your horse or pony you have to give him more feed.

As long as your cob is carrying enough condition, which sounds like the case,

he will have enough stored energy reserves to fuel any additional requirements.

The largest consideration is his fitness. The fitter and leaner your horse is, the more natural energy he will have.

However, you also need to ensure he is receiving a balanced diet. If your cob doesn't get the recommended amount of compound (bagged) feed, try adding a feed balancer.

This will provide a comprehensive supply of vitamins and minerals to keep his diet complete.

## Lumpy saddle flocking

**Q** I have owned my saddle for 10 years, which was new when I bought it. I've noticed the panels feel quite hard and lumpy. What should I do about this?

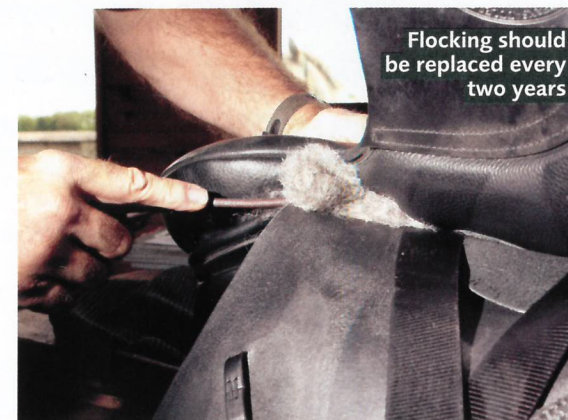
*Julie Collard, by email*

**LAURENCE SAYS** If the saddle has a flocked panel it is recommended to remove all the old flocking after two years and completely renew it.

The new wool will be softer and more forgiving on the horse.

With use, flocking gets compacted and becomes hard and lumpy, which will be uncomfortable for the horse.

Lumps in the flocking can cause pressure points on the back, which will result in swellings that come up after riding.



Flocking should be replaced every two years

These can then lead to permanent white markings in the coat.

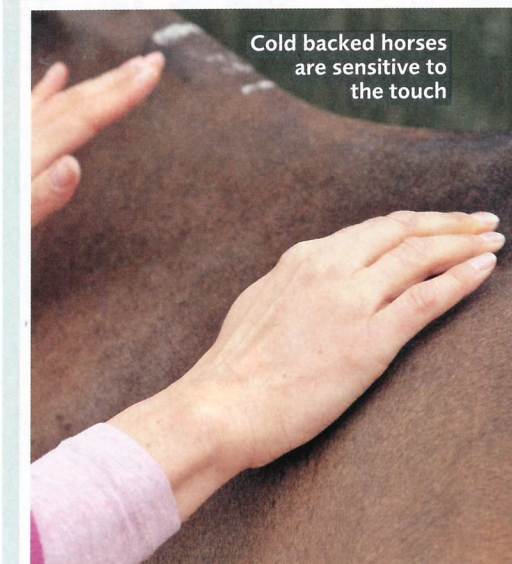
During the course of the year, your horse may change shape. If this happens, the flocking may require some adjustment, which can be done easily by a qualified saddle fitter.

## What does 'cold backed' mean?

**Q** Can you tell me what the term 'cold back' means? Is it possible for a horse to be sensitive, or will there always be an underlying medical condition?

*Sandra Todd, by email*

**IMOGEN SAYS** 'Cold backed' horses hollow their back to duck away from weight, or arch their back by tensing the muscles that run along the spine, in response to saddling or a rider getting on.



Cold backed horses are sensitive to the touch

In extreme cases, horses have been reported to collapse as the girth is tightened or the rider mounts.

It is certainly not normal for this level of reaction and suggests some form of pain or a behavioural response learned from a previous bad experience.

The majority of cases stem from pain associated with the use of ill-fitting saddles or insensitive riding.

Having a saddle professionally fitted is important. However, if the damage has already been done a physiotherapist may be able to help release the tension that has been acquired in the horse's back.

In more complicated cases, there can be serious underlying back problems, or even a subtle lameness or gastric ulceration.

If your horse shows symptoms of a cold back, the first course of action is to identify the cause. Your vet, physiotherapist and saddler can help with this.