

# Northern Horse

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## Looking after your horsepower

**M**yopathy and myositis are terms used to describe damage to muscle cells. When this happens muscle enzymes are released and can be easily measured in a blood sample. This is used to help diagnose a number of different myopathies, of various causes.

### So how do I know if my horse has damaged some muscles?

In some cases, just one or a small group of muscles is affected and usually the signs would be mild. In other cases, larger groups of muscles can be affected. Your horse may appear stiff, with a shortened stride or may not want to move at all. His muscles may feel hard and hot. He may even look sweaty, distressed or colicky. When this happens during or shortly after exercise it is called "tying up". Other names include azoturia, exertional rhabdomyolysis, exercise-related myopathy or Monday morning dis-

### EQUINE VET

The problem of equine muscle disease is this month's issue, tackled by **Rachael Ridley** of the Bishopton Veterinary Group, Ripon



ease. The exact mechanism by which muscle damage occurs is unclear, but the damaged muscle cells release breakdown products which are excreted in the urine. The urine will may become discoloured (dark red/brown) and in severe cases, the kidneys may be damaged.

### What should I do if I feel this happening when I'm riding?

You should stop, get off and try to keep your horse as quiet and calm as possible. Call your vet. Ideally do not move the horse until your vet has said it is safe to do so. Depending on the severity of signs your vet may use anti-inflammatories (e.g. Bute), a sedative drug to act as a muscle relaxant and sometimes fluids (either by stomach

tube or drip). A period of rest will be advised.

### Is it likely to happen again?

It may be a one-off, perhaps because the horse has been overworked, maybe after a rest period while still on full rations. However, we do know that some horses are predisposed to recurrent bouts of tying-up (recurrent exertional rhabdomyolysis, RER) – stressy mares seem to be particularly at risk. In other cases there may be an underlying condition which needs investigation. Quarter horses and draft breeds may be affected by a condition called equine polysaccharide storage myopathy (EPSM) which alters the way that energy is stored in the muscles. Diagnosis is confirmed

by muscle biopsy (a small sample of leg muscle taken under standing sedation).

### If it keeps happening, does that mean I won't be able to ride again?

Usually not. Once a definite diagnosis has been made, your vet will advise you on your horse's diet and exercise regime which will help control his symptoms. In recurrent cases, diets which are low in carbohydrate and high in fat and fibre will help along with regular, controlled exercise. In severe cases medication prior to exercise is used to control the problem.

### My horse isn't ridden. Does that mean he won't have any of these problems?

There are other causes of

muscle damage which are not related to exercise. Trauma to a muscle, for example, from a kick or fall will cause transient damage but should heal in time. Horses which have had a general anaesthetic, or older horses who have become cast, can suffer serious myopathy, simply caused by the pressure of their own body weight. Sometimes these cases do not make a full recovery.

Atypical myoglobinuria is a recently identified disease which affects horses at grass. Signs include dullness, lethargy, reluctance or inability to move, lying down, sometimes patchy sweating and mild colic signs. Cases often occur in outbreaks with a number of horses in a group are affected. Blood tests show raised muscle enzymes, indicating muscle damage. The cause is currently unknown and although it is uncommon sadly most affected cases die.

● Contact your vet for further advice.

## Benefactor backs carriage drive entrants

A GENEROUS benefactor will continue to encourage newcomers to carriage driving.

Hugh Scott-Barrett and his wife Karen's donation this year to the British Horse Driving Trials Association (BHDTA) means the association can offer discounted start fees to members – and novice entry fees will be waived.

Intermediate, open and advanced singles drivers will all pay £13.

Last year the Scott-Barrett's donated funds so that no regional or national competitor paid start fees. However, this year the money will be spent on the discounted fees as well as putting funds aside for much-needed obstacle building and other items relating to the sport.

Start fees were introduced in 2008 to replace the need to register horses and ponies and are calculated on a sliding scale from novice singles to four-in-hand.