

# Ask the experts

Simple solutions for horse owners

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## Vet



**TOBY KEMBLE**

BVetMed MRCVS is an equine vet based at Wensum Valley Vets, in Norfolk. Visit [www.wensumvalleyvets.co.uk](http://www.wensumvalleyvets.co.uk)

## Reducing the risk of choke

**Q** My 15-year-old thoroughbred gelding has had three episodes of choke in the past two months. What's causing this and how can I prevent it? **Sarah Campbell, Kent**

**A** He may be eating his food too quickly without chewing it properly. This can happen if a horse is fed alongside other horses and feels that he has to eat it all before the others get it. If this applies, try feeding him on his own or placing large rounded pebbles (about the size of an adult's fist) in his feed bowl so that he has to root around for the feed.

It could also be that the food's too dry for him - adding water may help. If these ideas don't solve the problem, get your vet to look for dental problems (sharp edges on his teeth may make him reluctant to chew). If this still doesn't solve the issue, your vet may wish to pass an endoscope down his oesophagus (gullet) to check for problems such as scarring or restrictions, weaknesses in the muscle wall or in rare cases, tumours.



Placing a large item in your horse's feed will slow down his eating

## The causes of laminitis

**Q** My 17-year-old Welsh Section A pony has had laminitis for a third time. He's not overweight and I don't let him eat too much grass in the spring, but I can't seem to prevent it. Where am I going wrong? **Emma Hiles, Herefordshire**

**A** Native breed ponies have evolved over thousands of years to live off the rough sort of grass that you see on Welsh mountains, Dartmoor, Exmoor and in the Shetland Islands. They are 'programmed' to eat as much as they can when times are good to get them through the lean times. This is fine until we put them on cultivated, lush grass when their over-active appetites cause them to take in too many calories over too short a period of time, resulting in laminitis.

While this is the most common cause of laminitis, there can be other reasons such as Cushing's Disease and Equine Metabolic



Native breeds will eat as much as they can when the grass is good

Syndrome (EMS). I'd chat to your vet about this as they might think blood tests would be appropriate. Cushing's Disease, in particular, can now be controlled very effectively in most cases with a single daily tablet.



Doing up a girth can cause mild discomfort but doesn't mean your horse has a gastric ulcer

## Girthing woes

**Q** When I do the girth up on my mare she sometimes turns around and tries to bite me. She also stops at fences for no reason. I've asked my vet if it's ulcers and he said probably not, should I get another opinion? **Alison Upton, Staffordshire**

**A** Gastric ulcers are relatively common in horses who are stabled most of the day and fed large quantities of concentrated feed. This is most common in the racing industry so there's a lot written about gastric ulcers, often encouraged by the manufacturers of ulcer treatments. In horses that are kept mostly at pasture, being fed on high roughage, low concentrate diets and in a stress free environment, the condition is relatively uncommon.

Doing a girth up can cause mild, temporary discomfort or irritation and

your horse is trying to persuade you not to do it! This may even be a saddle issue so get it checked out by a saddle fitter. Horses will often stop at fences, but this is just as likely to be an equitation issue.

Your vet's probably right that the cause isn't ulcers, but if you want to rule it out then the only option would be to get him to perform a gastroscopy on your horse. If he is unwilling then find a vet who is willing to, but bear in mind your vet's probably trying to save you the cost and inconvenience of a procedure, which is probably not going to give you an answer.