

Ask the EXPERTS

Simple solutions for horse owners

EMAIL YOUR QUESTION TO REBECCA.STATHAM@BAUERMEDIA.CO.UK

Got a problem? Need an answer? We'll know someone who can help...

Veterinary



KIRSTIE PICKLES

Is an equine vet at Scarsdale Vets - part of the XLEquine group

Preventing atypical myopathy

Q I've heard a lot about atypical myopathy recently, should I be worried?

Sam Thomas, Inverness

A Atypical myopathy is a frequently fatal muscle disorder seen in grazing horses in the autumn and/or spring. Recent research has indicated that ingestion of a toxin (hypoglycin A) from the seeds of the sycamore tree is the likely cause.

Previously rare in the UK, the number of reported cases has increased substantially in recent years (from only three in 2010 to 165 in 2013). Although part of the increase may be better awareness and recognition of the disease, it also appears to be becoming more frequent. Clinical signs usually appear suddenly, are severe and progress rapidly.

Early signs consist of:

- Tiredness
- Decreased appetite
- Colic
- Muscle stiffness or lameness

Affected horses pass dark coloured urine due to increased myoglobin content, which is a breakdown product of muscle. Horses that develop atypical myopathy are usually kept in sparse pastures with an accumulation of dead leaves, dead wood and trees in or around the pasture and are often not fed any supplementary hay or feed.

Preventative measures consist of restricting pasture access to young horses when outbreaks occur, providing additional concentrates in spring and autumn or if pasture is poor, a salt block. The seasonal occurrence suggests that the disease can be prevented by permanent stabling during the critical periods (i.e. autumn and spring) or by reducing the time spent at pasture.

Protecting his legs

Q I'm worried about running my horse on uneven terrain when I compete in team chasing. How can I best protect his legs before and after competing?

Clara Newton, South Yorkshire

A There is an inherent risk in riding horses at speed over rough ground and there's little evidence that boots or bandages reduce sprains and strains. The best protection against such injury is to prepare your horse well. Ensure he's fit and used to moving over uneven terrain.

However, don't over train as fatigue could cause stumbling or poor foot placement. Allow him to recover between events to prevent physical and mental fatigue, and regular farrier visits will help prevent overgrown feet and loose shoes affecting foot balance and placement.



Get your horse used to moving over uneven terrain by practising at home

Bringing him back into work after injury

Q My horse has been on box rest as he injured his tendon and my vet has told me to bring him back into work slowly. Can you explain why I need to do this?

Billy Meridith, Norfolk

A The tendon repair process is slow and fibrous scar tissue forms. This scar tissue doesn't have the same composition as the normal tendon. The repaired tissue becomes mechanically strong but remains stiffer than that of a healthy tendon, increasing the weight placed on the adjacent tendon tissue and a horse's risk of re-injury. During the initial healing phase, his lameness will start to decrease, however, the tendon will remain enlarged and soft. This is due to the growth of new blood vessels and fibrous tissue. A controlled exercise programme helps maintain function and optimises repair of the collagen within the tendon. Serial ultrasound scans should be performed every two to three months and before you increase his exercise level. The goal is to promote healing but prevent re-injury.



Carefully controlled exercise will help with tendon repair