

GASTROINTESTINAL ULCERS IN ADULT HORSES

General Information

Ulcers of the stomach and/or intestine can occur in adult horses, as they do in people. Two of the more common causes are, as in people, stress and use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs NSAIDs). In adult horses (yearlings and older), the source of stress may be difficult to determine and may be inapparent and long standing. Use of NSAIDs, such as phenylbutazone, is more likely to cause gastrointestinal ulceration when the horse is under stress. The following situations warrant careful observation for development of gastrointestinal ulcers:

- **Shipping the horse while it is receiving NSAIDs.**
- **Chronic problems that require long-term use of NSAIDs**
- **Chronic laminitis.**
- **The stress of competition.**
- **Chronic colic**
- **Dehydration. Horses receiving NSAIDs must be well hydrated before and while the medication is given. NSAIDs are more likely to cause kidney damage in dehydrated horses.**

Clinical Signs and Diagnosis

Signs of gastrointestinal ulcers in adult horses include low-grade intermittent colicky behavior, unthriftiness, decreased performance, and possibly some diarrhea. Ulcers can occur in the stomach and large colon of adult horses. Ulcers in the stomach may be seen by endoscopic examinations. Suspected ulcers in the large colon can be difficult to confirm, as they cannot be viewed by endoscopy. Blood tests showing low protein and possibly anemia support the diagnosis.

Important Points in Treatment

- **Minimize use of NSAIDs. In horses with chronic conditions requiring anti-inflammatory medication, consider other types of treatment.**
- **Feed your horse small amounts often.**
- **Horses showing signs of stomach ulcers should be medicated. It is important to give the medication regularly.**