

Why horses get gastric ulcers and how to treat them naturally

Stomach ulcers in horses is a major health epidemic in the equine world and may be preventable. Most people do not know for sure if their horses have gastric ulcers. They may only suspect that presence of ulcers because of small noticeable changes in their horses with ulcers can exhibit a combination of poor appetite, dullness, attitude changes, decreased performance, poor body and hoof condition, rough hair coat, weight loss and colic. Treating gastric ulcers with acid blockers sometimes helps to relieve the symptoms, but may prolong the problem. Horses have evolved to eat many small meals per day, almost on a continual basis. Even though the horse's stomach is only eight percent of digestive tract (eight quarts or two gallons), the emptying time of the stomach can be a mere twelve minutes and the rate of passage through the small intestine one foot per minute. The small volume of the stomach and the rapid passage of food to the small intestine is the reason that horses can, and are designed to, eat almost continuously. Gastric pH can drop lower than two, soon after a horse stops consuming food and the stomach will continue to produce strong acid even if food is not present. Statistics show that those who fed their horses four or five small meals a day had far fewer problems with gastric ulcers than those who fed their horses two or three meals a day. The bottom line is concentrate feeding can inadvertently contribute to ulcer formation by its influence on increasing serum gastric levels, lowering the horse's roughage intake and reducing the amount of time spent eating.

Management of equine gastric ulcers-

Various therapeutic protocols have been suggested for the control of equine gastric ulcers. These include antacids, (think of products such as Tums and Rolaids) and H² acid blockers such as the pharmaceutical products Pepcid and Prilosec. These treatments will reduce the acid in the fundic portion of the stomach and will reduce the occurrence of ulcers, but there may be unintended negative consequences from these treatments. There is a better way to protect the horse from and treat gastric ulcers. When the horse is given lecithin and apple pectin as a nutritional supplement to his normal diet, the acid in the fundic portion of the stomach immediately breaks it down into a mix of reactive phospholipids. Research has shown that lecithin not only treats the symptoms of equine ulcers, it cures the ulcers as well by making the stomach lining stronger at the cellular membrane level. They also observed horses fed lecithin had reduced levels of excitability and anxiety that was attributed to the healing of gastric ulcers.

A less expensive and more effective treatment is to give horses a nutritional supplement of lecithin containing apple pectins. The lecithin strengthens the epithelial lining of the stomach treating and preventing gastric ulcers and allow for proper absorption of nutrients in the small intestine. Lecithin has proven a valuable natural supplement for horses to treat and prevent gastric ulcers. Horse treats containing lecithin given between feedings and after training can help protect the stomach from the damaging effects of excess acid which is a natural occurrence in horses. When sourcing lecithin, remember that not all lecithin granules are the same. The best source of lecithin is a brand that contains apple pectins and sold through a dealer that sells animal products.