



Equine Back Pain

Back pain is often investigated as a cause of poor performance or behavioural problems in horses. The term 'back pain' includes a wide range of medical problems that may affect both soft and bony tissues of the equine spine. It is always important to understand whether a horse has primary back pain, or secondary back pain related to hind limb lameness. Meticulous inspection and analysis is crucial to obtain a precise diagnosis in these cases.

Horses with back pain may show a wide range of clinical signs varying from a subtle reduction in ridden performance to a dangerous behaviour during riding. Most common causes of back pain are impinging dorsal spinous processes (kissing spine), sacroiliac joint disease, muscular pain and vertebral body articular facet disease.

There are several treatment options which vary according to the encountered problem. Rest from ridden exercise may be recommended for some causes of acute back pain. On the contrary, long periods of rest may be contraindicated with other conditions such as kissing spines or sacroiliac disease. In these cases it is desirable to achieve muscular development in order to stabilise the vertebral column. Local medication with Corticosteroids (CCSs) alone or in combination with other drugs, is often performed. The injections can be performed in the back muscles, in the vertebral joints, between the spinous dorsal processes or directly into the sacroiliac joints.

Mesotherapy is another suggested technique to stimulate the muscles and inhibit pain derived from the dorsal horn of the spinal cord. Systemic medications such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (Bute) or skeletal muscle relaxants are also used alone or in combination with physiotherapy or osteopathy. Bisphosphonate drugs can also be used which are thought to reduce bone resorption.

Several surgical techniques have been proposed, varying from the more invasive complete resection of the dorsal spinous processes to the less traumatic resection of the ligament between the kissing spines. For more information about equine back pain or to talk about your individual horse please do get in touch. Here at Wendover Heights Equine, our dedicated Equine Vets are always ready to offer to your horse the best possible diagnostic procedures and treatment options in case of back problems.

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