

Gastric ulcers

To help understand why equine gastric ulcers develop first we need understand the physiology of the horse's stomach. The horse's stomach produces stomach acid 24 hours a day, unlike humans who only produce acid on demand. This is fine for a horse in its normal habitat where it will be grazing between 17-22 hours a day and therefore creating saliva to reduce the pH of the stomach acid. However, any activities that decrease the time spent chewing and producing saliva increase the stomach acid pH resulting in stomach ulcers and acid related pain, which can be seen as performance and behavioural issues. A horse's stomach is lined by two different mucosal tissues; the top 1/3 is lined by squamous mucosa and the bottom 2/3 by glandular mucosa and both layers can ulcerate.

A schematic drawing of the equine stomach

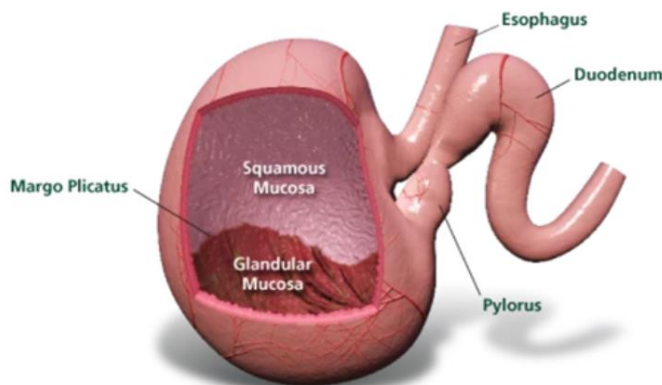


Image source: Amacron equine

Clinical signs

- Reduced appetite
- Weight loss
- Slowed eating
- Poor performance in ridden work: fatigue or reluctance to jump
- Behavioural changes
- Resentment of girthing

Diagnosis

If gastric ulcers are suspected based on clinical signs, then the most accurate diagnostic test is gastroscopy (video-endoscopy of the stomach).

Treatment

Squamous ulcers

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Glandular ulcers

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Gastroscopy is then repeated after the treatment course to determine progression of ulcer healing and guide further tapered treatment to prevent ulcer reoccurrence, just stopping treatment results in high reoccurrence rates. Your veterinary surgeon will also give advice on a maintenance plan involving feeding and management changes to prevent gastric ulcer reoccurrence.

Prevention

- Allow access to forage as much as possible, predominantly during the day (7am to 11pm), at a minimum daily rate of 1.5kg/100kg body weight
- Allow natural grazing as much as possible however if stabling is required provide multiple forage sources in the stable to allow foraging activity
- Reduce stable stress as much as possible: stable mirrors, daily direct horse to horse contact
- Free access to fresh water 24 hours a day
- Concentrate ration should be ideally split into 3 meals per day and total starch intake should not exceed 2g per kg bodyweight per day