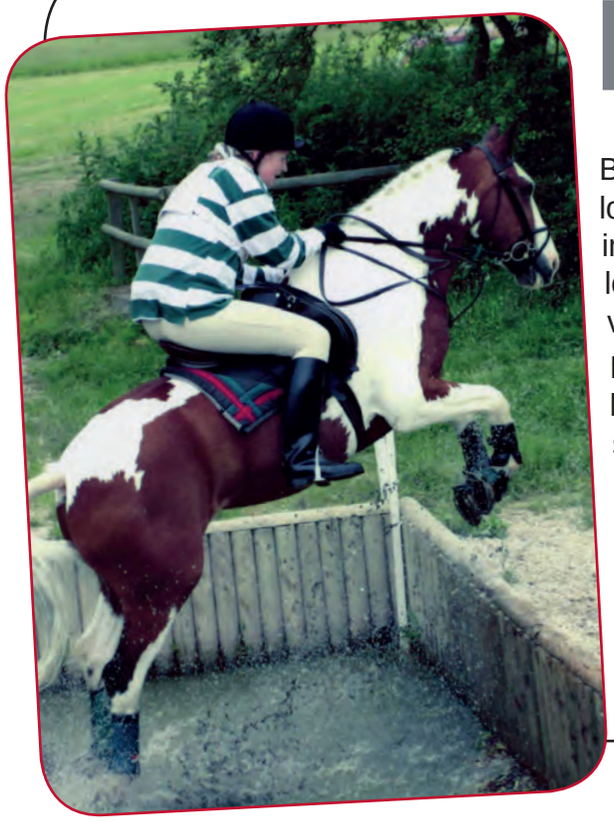
XL Vets Equine

Fact Sheet



Bone Spavin

Bone spavin is the term used for osteoarthritis of the lower joints within the hock, most commonly the distal intertarsal and tarsometatarsal joints. These joints are all low movement joints unlike the upper joint about which the vast majority of flexion and extension of the hock occurs.

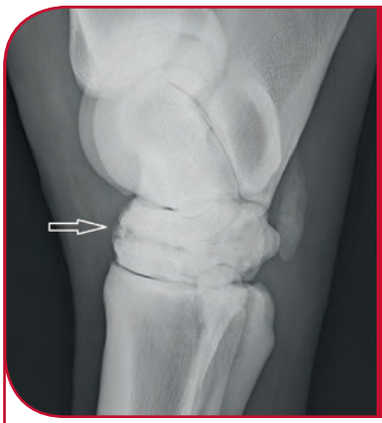
Bone spavin is one of the most common forms of hind limb lameness seen in the horse. It is most frequently seen in mature performance and pleasure horses but can also be seen in young racehorses. It is thought to be caused by repeated compression and rotation of the small bones within the hock; although in some breeds e.g. Icelandic there may also be a hereditary component. Horses with poor hock conformation e.g. sickle or cow hocks are more prone to develop the condition.

Signs

Lameness is normally present in one or both hind legs and affected horses often move with a short-striding choppy gait. Most horses with bone spavin show an increase in degree of lameness in response to flexion of the limb. Examination of the foot often reveals a squared toe due to dragging of the toe on the affected side. The muscles over the quarters may be wasted on one or both sides. Swelling on the inside lower hock area is also present in some cases. In cases where both hocks are equally affected the horse may present with a loss of performance or suspected back problems.

KEY POINTS

- Bone Spavin is osteoarthritis of the lower hock joints.
- It is one of the most common causes of hindlimb lameness.
- Diagnosis requires a combination of joint blocks and x-rays.
- The aim of treatment is to get the small hock joints to become pain free.
- Lots of treatments are available – discuss with your vet to get the most suitable approach for your horse.



NEW BONE FORMATION (ARROW) INDICATES OSTEOARTHRITIS IN THE LOWER HOCK JOINTS KNOWN AS BONE SPAVIN

Bone spavin may be suspected on the basis of clinical signs, but a definite diagnosis can only be made after a nerve block and x-ray of the affected area. Most horses with bone spavin will show significant improvement in the degree of lameness in response to the injection of local anaesthetic into the tarsometatarsal joint. X-rays of the area will show some osteoarthritis changes such as a narrowed joint space, new bone formation and areas of bone loss in the bone below the cartilage. Changes on x-ray are fairly common and can be seen in sound horses so it is important the diagnosis is made in conjunction with the results of nerve blocks.

Scintigraphy or bone scanning can help with diagnosis in difficult cases including those horses that will not tolerate needles and become difficult or dangerous to nerve block.

Treatment

The aim of treatment for bone spavin is to make the horse sound through reducing pain and inflammation and/or promoting fusion of the joints. There are lots of different treatment approaches available, it is important to discuss all these options with your vet in order to get the most appropriate treatment for your horse.

Treatment options

1. Corrective shoeing – balancing the hind feet correctly will reduce stress on the hock joints.
2. Glucosamine and chondroitin (joint supplements) - may be helpful in mild cases.
3. Pain relief – Bute (phenylbutazone) can be given to decrease pain associated with the hocks and allow continued controlled exercise. This movement may stimulate the joints to fuse naturally.
4. Steroid joint injections – give targeted anti-inflammatory action to the small tarsal joints relieving pain. Injection may need to be repeated every three to six months.
5. Bisphosphonates – aims to prevent excessive loss of bone at the small tarsal joints, which can reduce pain and promote joint fusion.
6. Chemical fusion of the small tarsal joints using ethanol.
7. Surgical fusion of the small tarsal joints – this involves anaesthetising the horse and drilling across the small tarsal joints to stimulate fusion of the joints. This is not usually a first line treatment.

STEROID ANTI-INFLAMMATORIES INJECTED INTO THE SMALL TARSAL JOINTS CAN RELIEVE THE PAIN ASSOCIATED WITH BONE SPAVIN

Many horses suffering from bone spavin will return to soundness and normal work but it can take six months to two years for full recovery in some cases. Some affected horses are left with a residual lameness or gait abnormality and are retired or resume work at a lower level.

XL Vets Equine

XLEquine is a novel and exciting initiative conceived from within the veterinary profession made up of independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout the United Kingdom, members of XLEquine are committed to working together for the benefit of all their clients.

For further information contact your local XLEquine practice:

www.xlequine.co.uk