



Equine Arthritis: A Joint Approach

We are pleased to introduce the latest XL Vets campaign, "Equine Arthritis: A Joint Approach", with a focus on recognising and managing arthritis in affected horses. Arthritis is behind two thirds of lameness cases, and prompt diagnosis and initiation of treatment is important for the best chance of a good outcome.

The early signs of arthritis can include changes in behaviour, tripping, uneven shoe wear, reluctance to jump or perform certain movements, stiffness and increased time to warm up. Lameness will follow if the condition is left untreated; this tends to be worse in cold wet weather or following a change in exercise regime. On an initial visit, the vet will first perform a clinical examination and lameness assessment, which may include trotting on a hard surface, flexion tests and trotting on a circle. Nerve and joint blocks followed by x-rays may be necessary to localise the affected joint. In certain cases, specialist imaging such as MRI may be required to reach a diagnosis.

Unfortunately, arthritis is a condition that cannot be cured, but good management can keep horses pain free and prolong their ridden career. In addition to treatments such as anti inflammatories and joint injections, there are steps owners can take to improve their horse's comfort level. Keeping arthritic horses in a lean body condition will reduce the pressure on affected joints, whilst light regular exercise will reduce stiffness and maintain muscle mass. Physiotherapy can also be a useful adjunct to promote suppleness. In winter, turn out in very muddy or icy conditions should be avoided to prevent slipping. Rugging is important as joint pain can worsen when horses get wet and cold; the amount of insulation in the rug should be based on the horse's body condition and the outside temperature. Regular foot care and farriery is vital in all cases, as changes in hoof angle can increase strain on the joints. Depending on the joints affected, some horses will benefit from remedial shoeing.

If you are worried that your horse may be suffering from arthritis or if you would like further advice on managing an arthritic horse, please talk to us. Our vets will be happy to discuss any concerns with you and recommend suitable next steps.

Equine Arthritis can occur in horses of all ages - why?

Up to 2 YEARS	2-5 YEARS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developmental joint disease Poor conformation Over rapid growth and incorrect diet Previous injury or joint infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over exertion at an early age Breeds mature at different ages Injuries Poor foot balance Untreated developmental joint disease
Middle Age 5-15 YEARS	Senior 15+ YEARS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obesity Inappropriate work load Poor foot balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignoring the early signs Undiagnosed arthritis being treated as an alternative injury Excessive repetitive work Obesity

Treatment Options:

- Identify and address the likely causes
- Medication
- Surgery
- Medical management
- Foot balance and shoeing
- Nutrition and Nutraceuticals (joint supplements)
- Management

Managing Arthritis in your horse

Which joints are most commonly affected by Arthritis?

Winter is here and with it the dark nights, heavy rugs, and stabled horses. Horses are herd animals, and rely on each other for protection. Being on their own in a stable can be quite daunting with no physical contact with another horse. Some horses find it a bit depressing; they want to go out in the field, then they standing wanting to come in again! Standing in all day is boring for your horse, and it can be the start of such vices as crib-biting or weaving.

Here are a few tips for keeping horses entertained during winter:

“Neigh”bours:

If possible, stable your horse in the close vicinity of others, either in different stables, or out in an adjacent field. They will be more relaxed if they can see, hear (even touch) their herd mates.

Radio:

Many horses seem more at ease if they feel they are not alone, and the sound of human voices from a radio left on in the stables can ease any anxiety.

Mirror:

A stable mirror must be horse-specific (ie. made of plastic not glass), It is a great way to add light to the stable and give your horse something to look at. Their reflection makes them think they are not alone.

Hanging treats:

If your horse is stimulated by food, then edible treats hanging from the stable roof can keep them busy. Thread some baler twine through a hole in a carrot, apple or turnip and hang from the rafters. Vegetables are healthy, but they will get through them pretty quickly, so you may prefer the manufactured licks. Bear in mind though that these are sometimes messy, and often end up on your horse's face and mane!

Treat balls:

Chopped fruit or vegetables inside a specially designed ball will encourage your horse to push the toy around the stable. As it rolls to and fro, the food drops out.

Small-hole hay nets:

We try to encourage feeding forage from the floor as it closer mimics normal grazing, the horse's teeth and other anatomy have evolved to be in this head-down position for hours and hours at a time. However, some stabled horses waste it if it is left on the ground, or eat it too quickly and then stand with nothing. Special small-hole haynets are designed to only allow small bites of forage to be taken, therefore increasing the time it takes to eat up. The same result can be achieved by placing one haynet inside another, or even inside a third, to make the accessible bite size smaller. Hiding pieces of carrot in a haynet can also be entertaining for the horse. Situate your haynet on the other side of the stable from the water bucket, to make them move around to get to each of them.

Salt licks:

These have health benefits and take ages to go down.

Getting out every day:

Try hard to give your horse exercise out of the stable every day. Even a couple of minutes hand walking round the yard can make a huge difference to their temperament, and has benefits for circulation too. A few hours of turnout either in an arena or out in a field may be possible, and would be even better.

