



# Ark Vet Centre

## Equine Newsletter



🌸 March 2023 🌸

Welcome to the March newsletter, at times it felt like we were back into winter this month but with the clocks changed now spring feels like its here! We had an announcement this month that British eventing are moving to 6 monthly boosters again (you need to have had a booster within the 6 months prior to the competition) so we have been busy vaccinating again. Unfortunately some of you may have seen on social media there was an increase in reactions to vaccines (symptoms such as sore necks/high temperatures). We had a few reactions earlier on in the month to certain batches of vaccine but we haven't seen any for a couple of weeks, so are not too concerned that it will turn into a major problem. This month we will be discussing choke following on from a couple of cases we've had.

### Choke

Choke is a relatively common problem affecting horses where the oesophagus (the tube which food passes down from the mouth to the stomach) becomes blocked. It is not a blockage of the trachea (windpipe) unlike "choke" in humans. Blockages are typically caused by food such as un-soaked sugar beet or pieces of carrot and apple but can also be caused by balls of hay if horses are struggling to chew it properly or sometimes just by a horse being greedy and eating too quickly.

Horses with choke usually have a frothy discharge from both nostrils that often contains pieces of food or grass/hay. They often make repeated attempts to swallow and may stretch their necks out, or may appear to have "spasms" of the neck. Some horses with choke may cough (often coughing out saliva) and may appear anxious but should not show signs of colic such as rolling.



### What to do if your horse has choke

Firstly try not to panic! Most cases of choke will clear by themselves within a few minutes without the need for any treatment. Take all food and water away from the horse and keep an eye on them. The horse should look brighter when the choke clears and food and saliva will stop coming from the nostrils.

You should call us if the choke doesn't pass quickly or if the horse is very distressed, shows any signs of colic, is having difficulty breathing or if the horse is off colour, develops a cough or a temperature in the few days after having choke.

### What will happen if a vet is needed

When we arrive we tend to give horses a sedative to help keep them calm and encourage them to keep their heads low (which helps the saliva to drain from the nose and reduces the risk of food and saliva being inhaled into the lungs) as well as Buscopan to help relax the oesophagus. In some cases horses are given a course of antibiotics to help protect them from developing lung infections, such as pneumonia, which is a potential complication of choke.

Usually a stomach tube is then passed and the oesophagus is gradually lavaged (washed out) until the obstruction is cleared and we are able to pass the stomach tube down all the way down into the stomach.

If your horse has not had a dental check up for a while we tend to advise getting teeth checked in case poor teeth have been the cause of the choke. Generally we would advise feeding sloppy feeds and reintroducing hay gradually after a choke episode.

