



Ark Vet Centre

Equine Newsletter



September 2023



Welcome to the September newsletter, the weather has certainly taken on a more autumnal feel and unfortunately the darker nights and mornings are starting. Now is the time to get prepared if you have older ponies or horses to care for over winter. It is always better to start to make a plan and implement management changes now rather than waiting until problems arise. We will be covering some of the things to start to think about here.

Winter care of older horses and ponies

Weight, Diet and Teeth

- Older horses and ponies often lose weight over winter due to the grass becoming poorer and an increase in the hay/haylage in their diet. If you feel that your horse isn't in the best of body condition now then you should increase feed / add additional food to their diet to try to increase body condition before entering winter. Most will lose a little weight over winter so it is important that they have some spare weight to lose. Senior feeds that offer improved digestibility and higher fats can be a great option for many older horses.
- Poor teeth can be a contributing factor to weight loss. Hay is a lot coarser than grass and therefore takes more chewing. Unfortunately some elderly horses who have lost teeth or have little to no grinding surface left on their teeth can struggle to chew hay. This can lead to weight loss and also increase the risk of colic and choke. Signs your horse may be having difficulties chewing are finding chewed up balls of hay on the floor (quidding) or finding hay left in the net overnight. Sometimes elderly horses will have to go onto other feeds such as soaked grass pellets because they are just unable to manage hay anymore. We recommend you book in a dental check now to make sure teeth are in the best possible condition heading into winter.



Mobility

- In the colder months arthritis can often flare up and you may find your horse to be much stiffer. This is attributed to the cold and damp weather, standing in for longer periods and doing less exercise. Two questions to ask yourself are: Do you see your horse trot or canter around the field? Are they lying down and rolling easily? If the answers are no then this is a sign that your horse may be in pain and struggling with arthritis. Pain relief and joint supplements are useful in these cases to increase comfort levels. Long term pain can lead to weight loss and a poor quality of life so it is important that it is discussed with your vet so we can help to address it.

Other things to think about

- Ensure they are drinking enough water. Horses don't like drinking icy cold water so consider providing warm water, adding electrolytes to the water or adding water to their feed. When they become dehydrated they are at a much greater risk of getting impaction colic, something we see frequently over winter.
- Keeping them well rugged, making sure that they are always warm enough will help keep weight on over winter.
- Worming - make sure that they have a wormer to treat encysted red worm over winter such as equest / equest pramox.
- Laminitis - even over winter laminitis can occur. Grass that is frosty can be high in sugar so avoid turning ponies that are prone to it out onto a frosty field.



Please give us a call now if you would like to discuss your horses or ponies and one of us will be happy to help you formulate a plan for winter.

