



Ark Vet Centre

Equine Newsletter



October 2024



Welcome to the October newsletter, autumn feels like its well and truly arrived with colder and darker mornings already starting. Autumn is a high risk period for both sycamore and acorn poisoning in horses with the sycamore seeds and acorns both falling onto pasture at this time of year. Winter storms and high winds can also exacerbate the problem causing large numbers to fall at once, onto pasture, where horses can then ingest them while grazing.

Sycamore Poisoning

Also known as atypical myopathy it is caused by a toxin called hypoglycin A which is found in sycamore seeds (helicopters) and the seedlings (which grow in fields in spring). The toxin damages muscle cells preventing energy being produced within the muscle. Clinical signs are similar to a horse tying up at exercise but may be more severe and include:

- Stiffness and reluctance to move or work
- Muscle tremors and weakness
- Sweating
- Red or brown urine (due to muscle pigment being released from damaged muscle cells and excreted via the kidneys)
- Difficulty breathing and sudden collapse
- Choke and colic



Diagnosis is based on history of exposure to sycamore seeds, increased levels of muscle enzymes in the blood and there is now a blood test which can identify the toxin in the blood to confirm sycamore poisoning.

There is no antidote to the toxin so treatment is supportive therapy such as administering fluids either into the vein or via a stomach tube (to prevent kidney damage), pain relief to help painful muscles, stable rest to prevent further muscle damage and it is also important to monitor muscle enzymes in the blood to monitor recovery.

Unfortunately because it can affect the heart muscle and also muscles required for breathing sometimes the prognosis is poor and some horses can collapse.

Acorn Poisoning

Acorns contain toxic substances called gallic and tannic acid which cause liver, kidney and intestinal damage. Oak leaves and tree branches are also poisonous.

If your horse has eaten acorns you may see the empty husks in their droppings. There are many different clinical signs of poisoning which include:

- Depression
- Loss of appetite
- Mouth ulcers
- Colic
- Constipation
- Drinking more than normal
- Severely affected horses may then develop diarrhoea, bloody urine and become uncoordinated



There is no diagnostic test to confirm poisoning so diagnosis is based on clinical signs, a history of grazing near oak trees and blood results. There is no antidote to the toxins so patients are treated with supportive therapy. This includes administering fluids either into the vein or via a stomach tube, treating any colic signs and keeping them away from oak trees. Unfortunately sometimes the liver and kidneys can become badly damaged in cases where they have eaten a lot of acorns and sometimes horses can never fully recover.

Ensuring your horse is not grazing on pasture that has oak trees and sycamore trees is the safest way of preventing poisoning occurring. Unfortunately both can be fatal if eaten in large quantities, treatment should be started ASAP so early diagnosis is important to give the best possible outcome.

Cushings

Just a brief reminder that Autumn is the best time to be testing horses and ponies for Cushings disease due to a natural seasonal rise in hormones. Please get in touch with us if you would like bloods done to diagnose your horse. Its definitely something worth considering if you have an older horse that has been struggling with laminitis over the summer.

