



Ark Vet Centre

Equine Newsletter



October 2025



Welcome to the October Newsletter, Winter feels like its properly on its way now with the nights becoming darker and colder mornings becoming the norm. We are well into acorn season now so will be discussing acorn poisoning this month and the symptoms that you need to be aware of.

Acorns

Acorns contain the toxic substances Gallic Acid and Tannic Acid. These acids can cause liver, kidney and intestinal damage and are found in acorns, oak leaves and branches. Acorn poisoning is rare but can be a particular problem in the autumn for horses grazing near oak trees.



Horses seem to have varying degrees of tolerance to acorns so it can be hard to accurately predict how an individual will be affected by eating them. It is also not always clear if your horse has eaten acorns or not as sometimes you will find the empty husks in their droppings but this isn't always the case.

Eating a few acorns will be unlikely to cause a problem, however, some horses seem to develop a taste for acorns, and will actively look for them to eat. Eating large amounts can be toxic to the liver and kidneys and can also cause intestinal upsets, symptoms can include:

- depression / loss of appetite / colic
- Mouth ulcers
- Dehydration / constipation

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Severely affected horses can develop diarrhoea, bloody urine and may become in-coordinated/wobbly if the central nervous system is involved.

There is no specific diagnostic test so the most useful aid to diagnosis is known exposure to acorns. If your horse is unwell after known consumption of acorns, then contact your vet for advice immediately.

Treatment & Prevention

Acorn poisoning is very hard to treat as there is no specific antidote to the toxins.

Patients are treated with supportive care which includes fluids either into the vein or via stomach tube in an effort to minimise organ damage

Depending on the severity of illness, some patients may require hospitalisation for effective treatment to be undertaken. This allows for more effective monitoring, nursing and assessment of response to treatment.

Prevention

- Don't let your horse graze underneath oak trees, particularly during the autumn, at times of acorn drop.
- Don't allow your horse to eat oak leaves or branches. They also contain the toxins.
- Fence off oak trees during the autumn to prevent access to acorns on the pasture.
- Check fields carefully specifically after high winds/winter storms as this can cause lots

of acorns to drop at the same time and they may even be blown outside the fenced area around trees.



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