

### Equine Cushing's disease

Cushing's disease is a disease of horses where the pituitary gland in the brain produces too much of a hormone called Adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH). It is also known as Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction (PPID). This overproduction is either due to a tumour of the pituitary gland, or a dysfunction so it overproduces the hormone. It is common in older horses and ponies.

Cushing's disease is not a curable disease, but manageable through medication.

#### Presenting signs

Common symptoms seen with the disease are:

- Failure to shed the winter coat/curly coat
- Laminitis
- Excessive drinking and urination
- Excessive sweating
- Weight loss (particularly muscle loss)
- Increased susceptibility to infection

#### Diagnosis

If your horse displays any of the above clinical signs, it is recommended to contact your vet and they will probably recommend testing.

Diagnosis of Cushing's disease is via blood tests. Perhaps the most common test is taking one sample and sending to an external laboratory to measure the ACTH concentration in the blood. The amount that should be present varies at different times of the year, so sometimes a repeat sample may be required for a firm diagnosis.

Sometimes, drug companies will run free testing schemes for diagnosis, so it is always worth discussing with your vet.

#### Treatment

As mentioned above, Cushing's disease is not curable, so your horse will require lifelong medication and regular blood tests.

The treatment currently available is a drug called Pergolide (*Prascend*). This is available in a tablet and each horse is individual as to the amount they will require. The starting dose will depend on the size of your horse.



Once started on medication, a repeat blood test will be due 4 to 6 weeks later and the dose adjusted according to the results. Once stable, blood testing every 6 months is recommended.

The treatment cannot be given to pregnant or lactating mares, and your horse will need signing out of the human food chain before starting treatment.

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