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EQUINE CUSHINGS DISEASE

What is it?

Equine Cushings is a hormonal disorder. It occurs when an area of the brain called 'pituitary', begins to grow abnormally and in so doing, over-produces certain hormones. It usually occurs in horses greater than 7 years of age and is more common in ponies.

What are the symptoms?

Extremely variable but may include:

- Long curly coat that is shed later and later every year – "hirsutism"
- Excessive drinking, eating and urination
- Lethargy
- Bulging of the supraorbital fat pads (concave area above the eyes)
- Recurrent infections
- Recurrent laminitis
- Excessive sweating
- Loss of weight and muscle
- Pot-bellied appearance



Pony displaying hirsutism, loss of spinal musculature and pot bellied appearance.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and confirmed with a blood test - two blood samples are required, 19-24 hours apart.

How is it treated?

Treatment is life-long, using a medication which is administered orally once daily. Reversal of symptoms occurs in 1/3 of horses but may take several weeks.

It is also important that these patients receive regular professional dental and hoof care and that infections are treated aggressively. Clipping of the hair coat should be performed if the horse is sweating excessively.

What happens if left untreated?

Life expectancy can be reduced, with an average of 5-7 years. If the pituitary grows sufficiently in size it may begin to compress other areas of the brain resulting in blindness or seizures.