

Do you have concerns about your horse's digestive health. Dr Kerry Ridgway was an vet and an expert in identifying and treating equine ulcers through palpation and accupuncture/acupressure techniques. Forageplus Horse Talk enables you to understand the implications for horses when they are in domesticity and prone to developing digestive tract issues in both the stomach and hind gut.

In my opinion there are only two kinds of horses: those who have ulcers and those who are going to have ulcers. Dr Kerry Ridgway DVM



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Humans suffering from ulcers are often aware that this condition is either caused by the food they eat or their working conditions, these circumstances are similar to horses which develop Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS). Horses are very sensitive to physical as well as psychical stress impacts, such as intensive training, races, changes in feeding or environment. Other strong psychological factors, such as shipping and relocation, can be

stressful to the horses. Stressed horses often get gastric problems or “stress stomach”, they develop gastric ulcers, get diarrhoea and colic, reduced appetite as well as failure to thrive. Research from Denmark and several countries have shown, that Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome is a very common and significant problem.

## Facts:

60% of all foals have EGUS in the first months after birth.

90% of all performance horses get EGUS.

60% of all horses in training have EGUS.

35-50% of pleasure horses will have EGUS.

Danish gastroscopic examinations in 250 horses have shown, that > 50% of pleasure horses suffer from gastric ulcers. Ulcers can lead to loss of blood, laminitis, irritability and poor absorption of nutrients, which is likely to reduce the optimum performance capabilities of horses in endurance, racing, show jumping, hunting, eventing or any sport which requires peak efficiency.

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Research by Franklin L. Pellegrini, DVM where a large scale necroscopic examination of the colons of 545 horses colons was conducted discovered a high incidence of colonic ulcers, up

to 63% in some cohorts. The study also looked at gastric ulcers and demonstrated that almost all performance horses have some kind of ulcer and that at least 60% of them have colonic ulcers. Shockingly the study found that a high incidence of gastric ulcers could also be found in around 44% of leisure horses. Performance horses and horses in training are often stabled and are fed high caloric concentrated feed in order to supply sufficient energy and protein. Feeding a concentrate, rich in starch with low contents of fibre, may increase the risk of gastric ulcers, as large amounts of excess gastric acid will be produced which after a short period of time will irritate the mucosa lining and epithelium.

## The Horse Stomach

The horse's stomach, designed for constant foraging, secretes gastric acid continuously 24 hours a day to break down large amounts of fibrous roughage as grass and hay. Adult horses secrete 25 - 30 litres of gastric acid daily, depending on the feed ration and content of fibres. If horses do not get sufficient feed containing rough fibres, gastric problems may occur, as they do not produce sufficient saliva to neutralize the gastric acid. The saliva production will halve if horses do not get sufficient roughage or hay. If horses do not get sufficient fibrous roughage but are fed ground concentrate rich in starch, excess gastric acid is produced. This acid is corrosive to the protective lining in the upper portion of the stomach, which may cause EGUS.

## Ulcer Symptoms in Foals:

Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome in foals occurs in the first months after birth and in the weaning period when the feed and feeding routines are changed. Researchers have shown that among even healthy foals without any symptoms, >50% of the foals had gastric lesions. In some cases ulceration can be severe enough to cause death.



- Poor appetite
- Intermittent colic
- Poor body condition
- Diarrhoea
- Grinding teeth
- Interrupted nursing

### Ulcer Symptoms in Adult Horses:

Horses are very sensitive to stress and stress may be a factor in the development of ulcers in adult horses.



- Poor appetite
- Attitude changes/depression
- Decreased performance
- Chronic diarrhoea
- Frequent colic
- Weight loss/bad thrive
- Rough hair coat
- Muscle sensitivity
- Sensitivity when girthing
- Sensitivity when grooming
- Cold backed/sore back

Other factors are ground concentrated feed rich in starch, few daily meals, intensive training or races, shipping and environmental stress impact. Reduced intake of rough fibrous feed can lead to gastric ulcers. Gastric ulcers cause great chronic pain, which leads to poor appetite, this is why “ulcer-horses” often, - but wrongly -, are seen as picky-eaters. As many of the horses do not show obvious signs of EGUS, an endoscopic examination is often needed in order to determine a correct diagnosis, however pressure tests can be useful as endoscopic examination cannot detect ulcers in the colon/hind gut.

Want to know if your horse might be at risk for gastric ulcers? Watch this video to use acupressure points to determine your horses level of sensitivity.

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