

Talking Ponies

Welcome to this special issue

After many requests from pony owners, we have produced this newsletter that is dedicated to ponies and pony sized problems! We have included the usual handy hints and seasonal reminders that are popular in our Talking Horses Equestrian Edition, but have focused on short topics and have included a pony crossword!

We have highlighted the most common pony problem of laminitis or founder, as ponies tend to be more susceptible to this potentially crippling condition. Over the last decade, research has provided a better understanding of the common underlying cause of founder – the lush spring grass that ponies like to eat! And it can also make them more “energetic” than normal as well!

Also, we provide some hints on the causes and how to avoid colic in ponies. Hoof care is an important daily chore to ensure your pony remains active and able to exercise, especially in older ponies. We provide some handy hints on hoof care to keep hooves healthy.

Special Note

We refer to your pony as a “he” in this newsletter as it makes our guidelines easy to understand. If your pony is a mare – then don’t feel that she is not important!

All the best from Dr. John

Seasonal Reminders

Worming

Spring and early summer is the most important time to worm your pony out. If he hasn’t been given regular wormings over winter, then give him a worm out for Redworms, Bots and Tapeworms in early September, again in mid October and as a special treat! – again in mid December as a Christmas worming – and of course, a few chopped up carrots or apples for his Christmas dinner!

Skin Care

With the wet spring weather, and then the burning sun over the summer months, your pony’s skin can develop rain scald or dryness, particularly if he is at grass with no protective rug.

Check your pony’s skin for lumpy, juicy soft spots over the head, the back and rump – it may be rain scald or ‘mud fever’ – if you are concerned, call your vet for advice. In hot sunny conditions, sunburn of the skin can be a problem for ponies with pale noses and body patches as in a pinto with white hair patches. If sunburn is a problem – fit a nose flap to cover the white skin on the nose or apply high factor sunscreen lotion every morning. A light cotton sheet can help prevent sunburn.

Topics:

- Understanding Founder – new findings
- Colic Watch – some handy hints
- Pony crossword – try your health care knowledge
- Plus seasonal reminders, handy hints and practical advice

HANDY HINT

1

If you find it difficult to use a paste wormer – he spits it out or rears up - then granule wormers in the feed can be used. If your pony sifts out the worming granules, then try mixing them in a bran mash sweetened with molasses – and if he still won’t eat the granules – freeze the packet of worming granules in the freezer. Then quickly add the correct dose rate to his favourite feed mix – he won’t be able to smell or taste the frozen granules – and oops – he’s been wormed. “Oh, drat!”, says the pony – but it is good for him.

HANDY HINT

2

Is your pony eating very slowly or dropping ‘juicy’ lumps of feed from his mouth as he eats hard feed or hay? This is called ‘quidding’ and is caused by the formation of sharp edges on the inside of his top molar or ‘grinding teeth’ and the outside of his bottom teeth, especially when you are feeding hard feed and hay which is harder to grind up. Your pony may lose condition despite an adequate amount of feed and may ‘toss his head’ around when the reins pull the bit and mouth lining back onto the sharp teeth! Have your pony’s teeth checked and rasped to remove the sharp edges – this should be carried out once a year to ensure your pony’s teeth are kept in good order for efficient digestion and optimum value from his feed.

HANDY HINT

3

When feeding pony pellets as a ‘cool’ hard feed, mix them with at least an equal volume of chaff to prevent your pony eating them too quickly, as he could choke or the pellets swell in his stomach to cause discomfort. Avoid mixing in too much molasses which may encourage him to eat more quickly – apple cider vinegar (50mL diluted with 50 mL water) may encourage him to chew his feed more slowly and salivate as he

Contact Details: FREECALL 1800 112 227
FREE FAX 1800 112 228
Website: www.kohnkesown.com
email: info@kohnkesown.com
Postal Address: PO Box 3234, Rouse Hill, NSW, 2155

Kohnke's Own

© Copyright 2005 John Kohnke Products

Understanding Founder - Ponies are Born to Eat

Spring rains and warmer weather result in the growth of lush grass, which can trigger the onset of founder in grazing ponies. The most susceptible are ponies in heavy condition with a 'cresty' neck, as this increases the likelihood of intolerance to the high sugar content in lush spring grass. The most dangerous period is when the early spring days are still cool, but bright and sunny during the day, but the nights are still cold.

How Does Founder Occur?

It's all related to the high sugar content, or what is referred to as a non-structural carbohydrate, produced by rapidly growing spring grass. During the sunny daytime, the grass produces these potentially dangerous sugars in its leaves, but the cool weather and cold nights slow the plant growth and conversion of the sugars to the structural plant fibre cellulose, so they build up in the pasture plants. Along comes a pony - "nibble, nibble, nibble - I really like this sweet grass" - so the pony grazes all day and eats too much food!

These sugars, called 'fructans', cannot be digested in the small bowel, so they pass into the large bowel, or hindgut, where bacteria normally ferment structural fibre in the stems and leaves. However, when large quantities of fructans and other non-structural sugars are present, certain bacteria which ferment sugars, multiply rapidly to upset the normal balance in the hindgut.

Is your Pony at Risk?

Certain ponies are more likely to develop laminitis - including:-

- ◆ Ponies with a previous history of founder - if your pony has long toes, lots of 'rings' or 'bands' on the hoof wall and low, flat heels - then he's probably foundered before.
- ◆ Ponies that are overweight - with a cresty neck and soft fat areas on the rump and 'tail butt' area.
- ◆ Ponies that are grey in colour - the aged grey pony often has a higher risk, especially if it is a "good doer" and "hoovers" all day eating grass.
- ◆ Ponies that have 'Cushings Disease', with a long coat, 'pot belly' and ribby appearance.
- ◆ Aged, fat ponies that are likely to have a form of diabetes or intolerance to sugars.

First Aid for Founder

If your pony develops a 'founder' gait - shuffling and standing with his front legs out front and leaning back on his heels - and he has had a 'big' night on lush grass - then carefully and slowly walk him to a yard to prevent him eating any more grass. Don't leave him in a paddock where he will try to walk too much, which will damage his hooves.

Call your vet.

While you wait for your vet, wrap ice blocks in a plastic bag around his hooves to cool them until the ice melts. This will help to reduce internal swelling of the hoof (laminitis). Repeat every 30 minutes until your vet is able to check him for founder.

SPECIAL NOTE

If the grass in your pony's paddock grows quickly after warm weather and rain, or the grass regrows with succulent shoots after being grazed off or slashed - then restrict his time spent grazing to avoid high grass sugar intake.

Did You Know???

'Grass Rings' or "bands" that appear as raised hoof wall material (called 'hoof horn') result from extra blood that does not flow into the hoof wall laminae, but is redirected by toxin action, through the coronet, the tissue that secretes the hoof wall. The higher blood flow for 2-3 weeks during the 'founder' period results in more hoof wall being secreted and a formation of raised rings or bands as the hoof wall grows.

Nasty Bacteria

These bacteria produce large quantities of a compound called **lactic acid**, which cannot be used for energy. The high **lactic acid** levels cause other bacteria to die and irritate the bowel wall, allowing harmful compounds to enter the blood stream and circulate into the hooves. The result - **toxic** damage to the internal structure of the hooves, weakening of the laminae and onset of laminitis and the more chronic condition of **founder**. This occurs when the internal hoof bone (pedal bone) is not held in its normal position by the dying laminae and can rotate downwards when the pony is walking or being worked - a crippling disease that damages the hooves permanently.

How can you reduce the risk of founder?

A little care to control the amount of grass your pony eats can help prevent founder.

1. Limit grazing to 1-1½ hours in the morning after the dew disappears off the pasture before 10.00am, and again for 1-1½ hours after 3.00pm on sunny days, particularly when grazing grass that is flowering or has seed heads.
2. Confine your pony to a yard overnight from nightfall and feed soaked hay - soak grass hay in warm water for 1 hour to remove dangerous sugars, then drain for 2-3 hours before feeding.
3. Consider feeding a founder preventative, such as Founderguard® daily.

Work your pony each day if possible to avoid him getting too fat - but if he is lame or has founder - restrict him to a yard and call your vet.

HANDY HINT 5

If your pony has founder, have your farrier trim your pony's front toes every 3-4 weeks to reduce the risk of rotation of the internal hoof (pedal) bone if your pony eats a little too much pasture, even when you are carefully managing his access to grazing.

HANDY HINT 4

Provide some soaked hay before turning your pony out to pasture to fill his stomach so he is unable to eat too much grass. You can also fit a 'founder' mask to limit the amount of grass your pony can eat when out in the pasture.