

VETERINARY PANEL OF EXPERTS



ROSSDALES
HERTFORDSHIRE

ABOUT
KATE HANNIGAN



Kate Hannigan DVM MRCVS

Kate joined Rosssdales Hertfordshire as a member of our ambulatory team in 2015. She qualified from Szent István University, Budapest in 2014 and subsequently completed a 15-month internship at Fethard Equine Hospital in Co Tipperary, Ireland, where she trained in all aspects of racehorse and sports horse poor performance work.

Kate is currently working towards her Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (Orthopaedics) and while she enjoys all aspects of ambulatory equine work, she is particularly interested in lameness cases.

Kate has ridden from a young age and has competed to a high level in 3-day Eventing. She is a keen follower of all equestrian disciplines, especially eventing and showjumping.

Loss of Appetite?

Tempting Fussy Eaters

By Kate Hannigan DVM MRCVS

It can be worrying for owners when their horse suddenly goes off their feed. It is important that your horse eats a balanced diet in accordance with the level of work he is expected to carry out, for maintenance of bodyweight and general wellbeing. For horses exhibiting a lack of appetite, it's important

to rule out any potential physical causes, notably dental problems, pain, illness or stress. Increased workload, or changes in feed and environment may also be factors to consider.

Dental problems

The obvious place to check first is your horse's mouth and it's important that your horse receives regular dental care by your vet or an appropriately qualified and experienced equine dental technician (EDT). Your vet or the EDT should examine the horse's mouth for sharp enamel points, signs of dental disease or other problems that may be a cause of discomfort. Older horses can develop dental pain readily due to conditions such as development of a diastema (a gap between the teeth) where food can pocket and cause gum disease, or abnormal wear due to loss of teeth.

Regular dental care (at least annually) and dietary changes to facilitate eating, such as soaking hard feed to form a mash and changing from hay to short fibre roughage, can help encourage a horse to eat.

Pain and Illness

Pain or illness is a common reason for a horse to suddenly go off his food. Pain may result from musculoskeletal

disorders (e.g. lameness, or neck or back problems), or gastrointestinal disorders (gastric ulcers, colic), or pain following surgery. Neck problems can mean that the horse is not comfortable reaching down for its feed bucket or tugging from a haynet and so it is worth offering the

feed at different heights to see if this is the reason for the apparent inappetence.

If your horse is in the early stages of a viral or bacterial infection, he may have a depressed appetite. Any clinical signs of illness exhibited should be noted (e.g. raised temperature, nasal discharge,

swollen glands/lymph nodes) and your vet should be contacted. Blood tests may be required to confirm an infection, and monitor deterioration and/or recovery.

Horses and ponies that are hospitalised at Rosssdales Equine Hospital will receive around-the-clock care from our specialist vets and professional nursing team. For horses recovering from surgery or with a serious medical condition such as chronic grass sickness, our nurses will prepare a 'buffet bar' or 'smorgasbord' of different feeds and they will spend hours trying to encourage the patient to eat – this may include different types of chaff, cubes, mixes, succulents such as carrots and apples, and grass: anything to encourage the horse's appetite.

Increase in workload

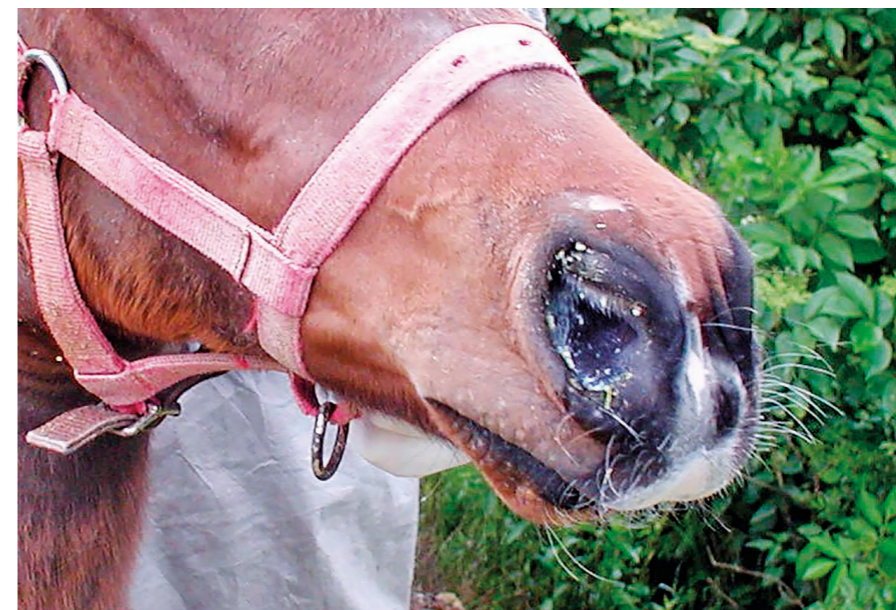
If your horse's workload has increased significantly and you have upped the amount of hard feed, you may find that your horse is not finishing his meals or experiences a temporary loss of appetite, particularly when he is competing. For sport horses and racehorses in hard training, appetite loss may be stress-induced and can result in gastric ulcers. These may require medical treatment, a reduction in exercise and a



A variety of feeds should be offered to a horse or pony that is inappetent.



Widening diastema (a gap between the teeth) is an advanced dentistry technique that can prevent food getting lodged and causing gum disease. This procedure is performed at Rosssdales Equine Hospital by a veterinary surgeon with dentistry expertise, using oral endoscopy as a guide. The horse is standing and heavily sedated.



Nasal discharge could indicate a viral or bacterial infection.



A young horse with a medical condition is given around-the-clock care at Rossdales Equine Hospital. The patient is being hand fed a pick of fresh grass by one of our nurses to encourage it to eat

change in diet to incorporate more fibre, and possibly an appropriate supplement to help protect the gut lining. A loss of appetite may be more apparent in hot weather and care should be taken to ensure that the horse doesn't become dehydrated.

Changes to the type or level of feed should be introduced gradually (over 1-2 weeks). If your horse isn't keen on eating the recommended amount of hard feed in order to get the correct energy requirements, it may be worth considering feeding an energy-dense feed. This will allow you to feed smaller amounts, but the horse will still get what he needs nutritionally to perform. Splitting your horse's daily feed rations into a number of smaller feeds per day can also be very beneficial.

It is recommended that you seek advice from a qualified equine nutritionist to ensure your horse is getting the correct level of nutrients for the level of work he is doing.

Stress

Horses may experience a loss of appetite due to stress, which could be as a result of travelling, or a change of environment – for example, staying away at competitions, moving to a new yard, or being turned out in a paddock with new field companions. A horse that is lower down the 'pecking

order' in the paddock may be discouraged from eating by other horses. Horses bothered by biting insects in the summer may experience a loss of appetite.

A routine that includes regular turnout can help to increase fibre intake, reduce stress levels and the risk of gastric ulcers for horses in hard work and receiving high levels of concentrates.

Changes in Feed

It may well be that your horse doesn't like the taste of the food you are feeding him, or you are feeding him more than he actually needs. The addition of feed supplements may change the taste of your horse feed, so if your horse experiences a loss of appetite coinciding with the addition of a new supplement, try removing this first. It is also worth checking that the food has not been contaminated, is "off", or out of date – does it smell as it should? Is there a fine white dust of forage mites? Is there mould growing? Food with oil in it may become unpalatable in hot weather as the oil changes with the heat.

Changes to your horse's diet should be made gradually and adding an appetising flavour such as mint, apple or blackcurrant juice to the food may encourage fussy eaters to tuck in. An imbalance of B-vitamins can also contribute to a lack of appetite,

so feeding Brewer's Yeast, which is rich in these may encourage your horse or pony to eat. Micronised linseed is also very appetising to horses, and is a safe source of energy if your horse is lacking in condition.

As a last resort there are some supplements containing caffeine, which can stimulate appetite. These should be used only on advice from your vet, as inappropriate use could be detrimental to your horse's health.

Conclusion

Many horses will experience a lack of appetite from time to time and this may happen for any of the reasons cited above. If your horse's lack of appetite is sudden in onset and lasts for more than a few days, or your horse's poor appetite has been ongoing for a period of time, you should consult your vet as it is important to determine whether there is an underlying health problem.

At Rossdales Hertfordshire, we are happy to offer veterinary advice to horse owners. Call us on 01462 790221 to speak to a member of our veterinary team or to make an appointment. www.rossdalesherts.com

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