



Mobile Veterinary Practice

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Equine Navicular Disease

Navicular disease has struck fear in the hearts of performance horse owners for decades. In the past, this syndrome was considered a death sentence. However, recent advances in equine medicine have shed valuable light on the dreaded navicular disease.

The distal sesamoid or navicular bone is located between the coffin bone and the short pastern bone. Its function is to cushion the deep digital flexor tendon (the tendon responsible for pulling the foot back during walking) as it travels down the back of the leg and attaches to the bottom of the coffin bone.

Historically, this area has been very hard to image, and thus extremely difficult to diagnose a problem. With recent advances such as digital X-Rays, and ultrasound becoming common place in veterinary clinics, practitioners have found that “navicular” disease is not as common as previously thought.

True navicular disease is a chronic degeneration of the bone, changing the surface from smooth to rough. These changes cause abrasions and damage to the tendon as it slides across the surface of the bone. Very little can be done to treat true navicular disease, because so many vital structures of the foot are involved.

Because the navicular area is where much of the force is concentrated during locomotion, many other structures can be involved. Damages to adjacent structures mimics true navicular disease and was very difficult to differentiate in the past due to poor imaging capabilities.

Horses with navicular disease or navicular pain are typically middle aged performance horses. Many times their owners complain that their horse isn't working up to their full potential. They will stumble or trip more often and can even have a noticeably shortened stride in one or both front feet. Quarter horses are most frequently afflicted by this syndrome, but it can also affect Thoroughbreds and Warmbloods.

Navicular pain is diagnosed by infusing a local anesthetic (carbocaine) around the palmar digital nerves that run along the back side of the pastern directly above the coronary band. The medication prevents the horse from feeling any pain in the back two thirds of the foot. This prevents the horse from limping and allows the veterinarian to establish where the pain is originating.

These symptoms can be treated in treated in a multitude ways. Conservative therapy such as corrective shoeing and pain medication can help a large number of horses. If conservative therapy is not curative, cortisone can be injected into the coffin joint or the navicular bursa to help relieve inflammation.

If you have a horse with a lameness problem don't count them out for ever. Thanks to new diagnostic and treatment techniques many horses can still have a long and productive career.

Colic- When is it time to call the veterinarian?!?!?

Most horse owners have been forced to face the question: “When is it time to call the vet if my horse is colicing?” The answer to this troubling scenario can be a bit confusing so here are a few things to keep an eye out for.

Rolling or laying down-It is normal for horses to lie down several hours a day and roll occasionally; however, if your horse is laying down and reluctant to rise, or if it is rolling continually it is imperative to seek medical attention quickly.

Gastro-intestinal (GI or gut) sounds- You should be able to place your ear on both sides of your horses belly in front of the flanks and hear gurgling every 10-20 seconds (if you practice this skill on your horse you can easily become comfortable with what is normal). If you cannot hear GI sounds on both sides or if they have decreased in frequency the problem could be more serious.

Heart rate- The normal heart rate for a horse is between 24-36 beats per minute. Be extremely cautious if your horse has a heart rate greater than 40 beats/minute.

Lack of appetite- If your horse is usually excited to eat and is suddenly uninterested, problems could be looming ahead. One common mistake is to feed horses to see if their appetite has returned. If your horse is colicing, withhold all feed until you are certain they feel better.

Fecal output- The average horse should pass 8-12 piles of feces throughout the day. If you notice a sudden decrease in the amount of feces take heed.

In summary, you know when your horse is not acting normal. Use the guidelines listed above to help you determine if this is a serious problem that needs to be seen by a professional. Remember, the earlier you can identify a serious problem and seek appropriate medical therapy, the better chance your horse has to make it out alive.

Wellness Programs—Save time and \$\$\$

Mobile Veterinary Practice is proud to announce several new wellness programs to help keep your horse healthy. Along with the benefit your horse receives from preventative medicine, we are also able to offer a **10% discount** on products and services. In addition, if your horse is currently enrolled in any of the wellness programs through MVP, in the event of an after hours emergency, **MVP will waive the \$75 after hours charge.** For full program details, please call the MVP office and we will be happy to discuss which program best fits your needs.



This may not be a profitable business, but one must consider the intangible benefits, such as the lifestyle one enjoys."