

Talking Ponies

A newsletter for pony clubs
& young riders 6-12 years

Issue 3 2011



From the editor...

Hi Guys. I hope that you are enjoying your ponies now that the warmer weather and longer daylight hours mean you can ride or spend more time with your ponies. It can be fun having a pony, but always remember that they are small horses which often have a mind of their own and can react suddenly if frightened, so please take care.

Always wear boots or covered shoes when handling your pony - never walk your pony on a lead in your bare feet or with thongs.

In this issue, we talk about common causes of lameness in ponies, especially in older ponies that start to suffer from stiff joints and a shortened stride.

We also talk about 'cool' feeds and the basics of balancing your pony's diet to ensure good health so that you can work and ride your pony.

If you keep your pony in a small paddock or near to the fence around a garden, please take care that your hungry pony does not nibble on flowers or garden trees which might be poisonous.

We have included a short list of the common garden trees and plants which could be poisonous to your pony. Ask mum or dad to show you from the list which plants or trees in the pony paddock or house garden are poisonous to your pony. Be careful that your pony doesn't nibble on trees or plants, other than grass, when taking your pony for a walk in a paddock or park with your friends.

And lastly, refer to handy hint 4 if your pony is prone to founder in spring.

Enjoy your ponies - Have a great time,

Dr John Kohnke BVSc. RDA

Bandaging Your Pony's Legs

It is a good idea if you are jumping your pony or doing pony sport competition to wrap his lower legs between the knees and fetlocks, and hocks and fetlocks, with a soft padded protective bandage. This will minimise bruising to the lower limbs if he hits a rail or brushes his legs when turning sharply at the end of a jumping round. Choose a soft 'polo' type bandage (in a colour that you like) and carefully look after it by washing it if it gets mud on it and dry it thoroughly before rolling it up for the next time you wrap your pony's legs. When wrapping the bandage on your pony's lower legs, make sure that you wrap in a direction which pulls the tendons on the back of each limb to the inside. This means to wrap the near side leg in an anti-clockwise direction from the side to the back of the leg and around on the inside of the leg. On the off side legs, wrap in a clockwise direction, or from the front to the back on the outside of the leg and then around the back to the inside. If you wrap the opposite way, you may pull the tendons out of alignment on the back of the legs and increase the risk of over-loading the tendon when jumping. If you are left handed, take care to wrap the tendon in the correct direction.

After you have worked your pony, quickly remove any bandages or boots to allow the tendons to cool. This is important to allow the heat produced in the tendons as they stretch to escape from the tendon and reduce the risk of damaging the tendon structure. Hosing the lower limbs down with cold water after working your pony in the bandages will also help to cool the limbs.



Handy Hint 1

If you would like more detailed information about any of the topics in this newsletter you might be interested in reading some of our other newsletters or fact sheets that you can find on our website at www.kohnkesown.com

In this issue...

- * Lameness - common causes in aged ponies
- * 'Cool Feeds' - keeping your pony quiet and safe to ride
- * Don't Poison your pony - plants to avoid

Plus handy hints and lots more!

Talking ponies is written to provide information for young riders and owners up to 12 years of age. It is designed to inform children so they can help keep their ponies healthy and sound. Talking horses Equestrian edition is suitable for older children and adults.

How much can your pony eat each day?

We all know that some ponies love to eat and have a big appetite for their size.

New research has shown that a pony can eat a lot of grass in a day if the grass is sweet and the pony likes the taste. Ponies will often choose the sweetest grass in their paddock and may graze for up to 21 hours a day, only taking 3 hours off for a sleep in the early morning!

Ponies, like horses, eat as they walk and can walk up to 7 kilometres a day while eating grass. Researchers have shown that ponies can eat more during the day than horses when you compare it to their size. This is especially true when they're grazing sweet spring grasses day and night. Ponies can become eating machines! This is why ponies often become fat and suffer from founder. Older ponies in particular are at risk because they are less active and changes in their bodies mean that they also aren't able to use up sugars in the grass the same way that they did when they were younger.

It was also found in another research study that a pony can eat just under half of its total daily grazing intake in the 3-4 hours in the evening and after dark when left out at night on good pasture during warm weather. This can also increase the risk of founder, so it is a good idea to lock your pony in a yard or stable during the night with a small amount of hay to eat, or if you have not got a yard, then buy a grazing muzzle and put it on the pony each evening before dark to limit its overnight feed binge!

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LAMENESS IN AGED PONIES

Just like humans, ponies can suffer from pain and stiffness in their joints, following a fall, a sports injury or as they age. Many ponies also have discomfort in their hooves as a result of having had founder sometime during their life. This can make them reluctant to stretch out. They can become sore in the feet when you ride them. Some develop lower back pain following a fall or can become lame from years of being ridden on hard surfaces, such as along the edge of roads. When they are competed over jumps and land heavily on the joints of their front legs the concussion can lead to lameness.

The major causes of joint pain in aged ponies is often because of damage or wearing away of the covering over the surface of their joints (called cartilage). The cartilage is a thin coating of a special tissue which protects the ends of the bones inside the joints. It compresses (is squished) to absorb concussion (jolting of the bones and joints when the hooves hit the ground) during exercise. If a pony is worked hard, the cartilage can start to lose its nutrition to keep it alive and its ability to function, or it can even wear away from the bone and allow the very sensitive exposed bone surfaces to touch each other, resulting in pain and lameness. This is more likely in ponies as they age, become heavier when fat, are jumped or are ridden by heavy riders.

The signs are often a soft swelling and pain in the affected joint, such as the fetlock. This can happen after hard exercise or jumping, or even following a gallop around the paddock for fun or when you are trying to catch your pony to ride! The pony may start to shorten its stride, rest to take weight off the sore joint or become noticeably lame and show discomfort even when walking.

In this case, it is best to dismount if you are riding your pony and walk it back to your home. If your pony is in severe pain and cannot walk without bobbing its head up when it puts weight on the sore joint, then stop walking the pony and phone for someone to come with a trailer to transport the pony back to its stable. Call your vet for advice.

Examine and Flex the Pony's Sore Joint

Handy Hint 2

If you can see swelling or 'puffiness' in a joint which is sore and causing the lameness, gently lift and hold the leg off the ground and bend it at the knee or hock. You can carefully press around the joint with your fingers to try to find where it is sore or swollen. Be careful if it is a back leg as the pony may pull away in response to pain and stomp on your foot or try to kick you. Always wear covered shoes or boots when working with your pony. If you cannot feel any soft swelling around the joint, then gently bend the joint with it off the ground to check if the pony is sore. If the pony shows discomfort with either of these simple checks, applying an ice pack and holding it in place with a soft elastic bandage for 10 minutes, or hosing the sore joint down with cold water for 5 minutes, may help reduce the swelling and pain. If the pony is still lame and sore, then ask your mum or dad to check the leg as well or ask them if they might call your vet.

Founder and Lameness

Handy Hint 3

If your pony has suffered from founder before you got him, or has foundered on spring grass in your paddock, and has flat soles and broken away hooves, then he may not be able to move freely when being ridden. He should not be cantered or galloped, as it may lead to increased damage to his hooves. Your farrier or bare foot trimmer may be able to help trim his hooves to make him more comfortable, but you must be aware that your pony has a risk of becoming more seriously lame if worked hard or allowed to founder on grass in the spring, especially if he has a 'cresty' neck.

If your pony becomes lame and is suffering from pain when walking around in the paddock or when stabled over night, then ask mum or dad to arrange for your vet to check the hooves and limbs to determine the site of the discomfort. Your vet may prescribe medication to reduce the pain and allow the pony to move around freely. However, you must ensure that you give the medication strictly as advised by the vet. Do not increase the dose unless you ask your vet. Some medications can cause damage to the lining of the pony's stomach (cause an ulcer to form) and this can be very painful and decrease the pony's appetite and interest in food. If your pony goes off its feed when being given a medication to make him more comfortable, then do not give any more until you seek advice from your vet.

Sometimes the pain in the joints will be worse during the cold weather, so you may have to ask mum or dad to discuss this with your vet, as the medication may have to be increased or changed.

If your pony becomes lame or develops swelling in a joint when being ridden, your vet may advise to give some medication for a day or so before you plan to ride your pony, such as on a weekend. However, if your pony starts to feel sore and becomes lame when you are riding him, it is best to stop, dismount and walk your pony home.

There are medications which contain nutrients that can help the joint cartilage recover from mild damage and improve joint health and function to allow your pony to be more comfortable when being worked or when walking around grazing in the paddock. These contain a nutrient called glucosamine and other nutrients which help the joint to maintain its flexibility and movement. A nutritional supplement, such as Kohnke's Own Nutricart, is approved to help joint health in horses when given as directed on the label. It is available from saddleries and produce stores, and although it appears to be expensive, it is not as costly as most other similar products because it is concentrated and the dose rate is less. Nutricart can help enable your pony move around and be ridden with less discomfort. After your pony becomes more comfortable, then you can reduce the dose and even give it just for 2-3 days before you plan to ride him. It does not have the risk of causing stomach damage, which can happen with some medications for joint pain.



'Cool Feeds' - keeping your pony quiet and safe to ride

If you cannot regularly exercise your pony, particularly in the spring time when he is out on lush, high energy pastures, or when you feed a 'hard feed' which contains too much starch or sugar based energy, then your pony may have too much energy and sometimes be hard to handle and too full of energy to ride safely. Even a normally quiet pony can react to a high energy, sugary feed and become difficult to control.

In this case, you may need to increase the time that you ride your pony each day to 'burn-up' the extra energy. This may be difficult because of school times and other sports. During winter when the day length is short or when a few days of wet weather it can be difficult and uncomfortable for you to ride or exercise your pony. If your pony is out on pasture, the best way to limit his intake is to reduce his time spent grazing. This is important if it is warm and sunny grazing weather. This also may be difficult due to school times, unless your mother or father are home to let the pony out to graze and bring him in early before you arrive home from school.

Another way is to ask your father to mow the grass so that it is short (50 - 75 mm high), which will reduce the amount of pasture your pony can eat, especially if you combine it with a 2-3 hour paddock turn out time. Do not feed grass clippings to your pony!

Reduce High Risk Grazing Time

Handy Hint 4

If your pony is a 'good doer' and likes to graze a lot, then during spring and summer when the grass naturally contains a high content of certain types of sugars, then it is very important that you reduce his grazing time, especially if he is fat and has a 'cresty' neck. If you can arrange with either mum or dad to let your pony out from 8am to 10am each morning to graze on the pasture before the sunlight during the mid-morning to 4pm period, which produces the highest level of sugars in the grass as it grows. You can let him out again in the afternoon for 1 hour after you come home from school. This will reduce the risk of your pony taking in too much sugar and becoming sore in the feet or foundering. Be careful if your pony is overweight and has a lot of fat stored above and around his tail butt and a firm 'cresty' neck as well, or has foundered previously. It is a good idea to feed him hay which has been soaked for 60 minutes in warm water, then drained for 15-30 minutes to air dry before feeding the hay, so as to reduce the sugar content of the hay. Soaked lucerne hay has less sugar as compared to soaked grass hay, especially rye grass or spring grass hay. One biscuit of soaked hay per 300kg body weight can be provided overnight, with a minimum amount of hard feed or in place of his normal overnight 'hard feed' of chaff or pellets. You can also add Kohnke's Own TRIM™ to his evening feed to help maintain a more normal weight and trim down his hard 'cresty neck' and reduce the risk of founder. If you cannot arrange to have your pony let out and brought back in to reduce his grazing time, then you should ask mum or dad to buy you a grazing muzzle for your pony from your local saddlery. The grazing muzzle can be put on in the morning when you turn him out and taken off when you bring him in after school. Always make sure that you adjust the straps so that it fits him without risk of rubbing on his face or allowing him to pull it off when grazing. This can occur if his face thins down a little on the reduced energy diet after a week or so of wearing a grazing muzzle.

Did You know that...

It is commonly recommended to feed ponies 'shedded' hay, or hay which has been stored for 12 or more months, in the belief that it contains less sugar and reduces the risk of a pony developing founder. This is not correct. During storage, hay does not reduce in sugar (or protein) content as it ages, but the content of certain essential vitamins, such as vitamin A (up to a 80% reduction of vitamin A activity stored as carotene compounds over a 6 month period during the summer months) and vitamin E (up to 60% or more lost during 6 months of storage), are reduced. Therefore, the sugars which can trigger laminitis and founder do not reduce when hay is 'shedded' or under cover in a hay stack. The best way to reduce the sugar content is to soak the hay in double its volume of warm water in a big tub, and then lift it out to drain for at least 15-30 minutes and to air dry before feeding it to your pony. It will also make grass hay, especially ryegrass hay, less 'heating' from its high sugar energy content and help make your pony less energetic or 'hot' to handle.

What is a 'cool feed'?

The term 'cool feed' is used to describe a lower energy feed, or one which has a slower time for release of energy during digestion and is less likely to make your pony too energetic or hard to handle when fed at the amounts recommended. Cool feeds are often based on a higher content of fibre, which is digested more slowly in the large bowel. They also may contain a slow release form of energy, such as a protein meal with little or no sugar or starch. Often these feeds contain energy in the form of fat (as vegetable oil, which is digested more slowly in the small bowel).

Cool feeds are sometimes called 'low GI' feeds, because they contain a very low amount of soluble sugar and increased digestion time of the energy in the feed can help to reduce 'hot' behaviour.

There are a few important points which you should be aware of when choosing a 'cool feed' for your pony.

1. Many pony pellets are classed as 'cool feeds' as they contain a higher content of fibre relative to grain based working horse mixes or pellets. Many of these are based on a bran and pollard mix, often referred to as 'mill mix' or 'mill run', which contain less starch or sugar as compared to grain based feeds. However, if your pony is overweight or has a 'cresty neck', then even a millrun based pony pellet may provide too much soluble sugar and risk founder. Always check the tag on the bag or the printed bag label, as it will declare if it has a lot of millrun, and you should reduce the amount you feed to your pony, or only feed him some on the days on which you are working him.
2. Rice based pellets are usually less likely to 'heat' up your pony, but again follow the directions on the label as to the amount to feed in relation to the time that you spend each day riding or working him. On rest days, reduce the pellets to a minimum and feed more chaff and hay.
3. Certain fibre based feeds, such as sugar beet fibre (eg Speedibeet®) or soyabean hulls (eg MaxiSoy®), or sunflower hulls (eg Omega Cool Feed), are more slowly digested and contain a very low sugar content and are suitable hard feeds in place of part of the chaff.
4. If you need a little more energy, such as for a sporting pony for weekend competition, then you can add a small amount of working horse mix to each of the 2 evening meals before the competition to boost the energy content without making him hard to handle or to ride in the in-between time. Even a small amount of steamed rolled barley grain (one 250 mL cupful per 100kg body weight) is a suitable 'cool energy' feed to add for a couple of days before a competition (eg prior to pony dressage competition or for a weekend or school holiday pony club camp etc when your pony is going to be worked for 2 or more days). This will reduce the problem of your pony becoming tired and 'sluggish' following a day or so of competition.

Top 5 Poisonous Plants That Could Affect Ponies

Ponies are more susceptible to plant poisoning compared to larger horses because their smaller body size means that a relatively lower dose of plant toxins can adversely affect them.

Also, some owners allow their small ponies or minis access to back yards and this puts them in contact with ornamental garden plants, many of which are poisonous to horses, ponies and minis.

Another risk factor for ponies is that 'good doers' might be on a restricted diet and a hungry pony could pick at weeds or plant cuttings that they wouldn't normally touch.



Avocado tree



Oleander

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Paterson's Curse



Prunus spp - plums, peaches, apricots etc



Flatweed

Did You Know that...

- Horse owners the world over approach to catch or mount a horse or pony on the left (near) side. The near side approach was historically adopted when soldiers carried swords and staves on their belts. They found that it was easier to approach and mount a horse on the left side, leaving the sword hanging on their left side so that they could grasp it without injuring or frightening the horse!
- The average horse weighs about a half a tonne (500kg) but its brain is the size of an average orange.
- A horse can see completely around its entire body except for small blind spots directly in front of its face, underneath its head, and directly behind itself.
- The horse has the largest eyes for its body size of any land animal.



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