



Claire's returning to work

Our Director Claire and her husband Dónal welcomed baby Kielan in July 2020. Claire has been on maternity leave since then but is returning to work in May 2021. Claire will be back working 4 days per week, taking Tuesdays off to look after Kielan. Claire will be returning to work under her married name, so will be known as Claire Maher (pronounced 'Marr') going forwards.

"I have had a rather different maternity leave to what I might have imagined pre-covid, but have enjoyed it none the less. It has been odd not being able to visit anyone; but I have enjoyed the time focusing on being a Mum. I've never had such a long period away from work before, but have kept in touch with everyone at Avonvale, and done a few days working at Warwick Races. I am looking forward to getting back to work in May and catching up with all of my clients and patients."



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Case Study

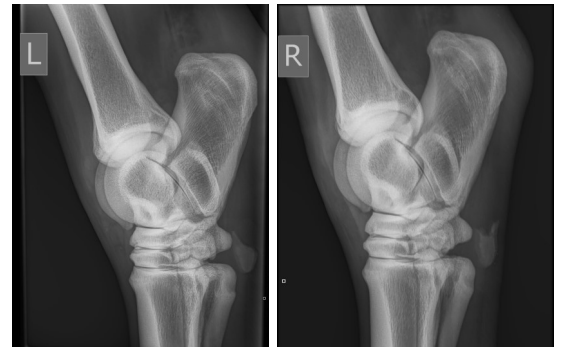
Magic's Lameness Journey by Emily Douglas-Osborn

Lameness can be complicated, particularly in teenage horses, as it is common to find more than one problem, and the recommended treatment for each problem can be very different.

Magic had presented to Emily and Stuart for lameness in October of last year, having felt 'not quite right' to his owner for a few weeks. He appeared to be mildly lame both behind and in-front. This type of multi-limb lameness can be difficult to pick up and often results in feeling 'not quite right' or behavioural problems rather than overt lameness.

As hock arthritis is common in teenage horses, Magic's hock joints were blocked first. This involves injecting local anaesthetic directly into the joints to see if numbing them improves the lameness. Magic blocked well to his hock joints, confirming that they were a source of pain. He also had his front feet nerve blocked to which he also responded well.

X-rays of the hock joints revealed some mild arthritis which was treated with corticosteroid joint injections. Over the next couple of weeks he followed a restricted exercise plan. Although Magic improved, he was still not right so further investigations were carried out.



Hock radiographs



Ultrasound image of thickened suspensory ligament

The lower hock joints lie very close to the origin of the hindlimb suspensory ligament. It is common for horses, particularly teenage horses, to have pain coming from both structures. If nerve blocking or medicating the hock joints alone does not result in resolution of lameness then the proximal suspensory ligament is usually the next place to investigate. In Magic's case nerve blocking the proximal suspensory ligament also gave a good improvement of lameness. The proximal suspensory ligament is imaged by means of an ultrasound scan, which in Magic's case revealed some inflammation. Magic's forelimb foot lameness was further localised to the coffin joints, which were also treated with corticosteroid medication.

At this point it is worth pointing out that Magic had now been diagnosed with 3 separate conditions, which together had resulted in his multi-limb lameness and the feeling of 'not being right'. This combination of conditions is relatively common in teenage horses.



Shockwave treatment

Following on from Magic's diagnosis he has had shockwave treatment of his proximal suspensory ligaments and improvements have been made to his shoeing in the form of supportive shoes all round.

Magic has made excellent progress since his diagnosis. His hock and suspensory problems are now under good control. His fore limb lameness is still causing some issues, and requires ongoing maintenance. But, with a good vet - farrier - physio team around him and a dedicated owner, we remain optimistic about Magic's future.



Sweet Itch

Every summer horses are plagued by swarms of flies. While some do not appear to experience any adverse effects as a result of this, others come up covered in itchy lumps and bumps. Why is this the case and what can you and your vet be doing to help?

What is Sweet Itch?

Sweet Itch is caused by type 1 and type 4 hypersensitivity reactions. These reactions involve your horse responding to a fly bite in a more pronounced way than normal. The horse's immune system is present to protect them from harm. When a fly bite is experienced, a small amount of antigen (allergen) is injected into your horse's skin. Normally the body would react mildly to this and may well not show any adverse reaction at all. However, in horses that experience hypersensitivity reactions, this response is scaled up and causes the formation of very itchy swellings in the affected area and often more diffusely across the body. Sweet Itch generally relates to hypersensitivity to a particular species of midge called *Culicoides*. Reactions to this particular midge tend to result in the base of the mane and the head of the tail being affected. These areas become very itchy, often resulting in hair loss, scaling and thickening of the skin.



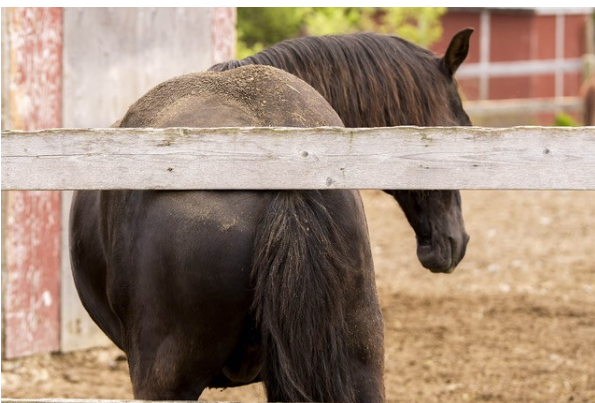
How is Sweet Itch Diagnosed?

When deciding if your horse is suffering from sweet itch and how to manage the condition, it is useful to consult your vet. Intradermal skin testing or allergen blood tests can be a useful way to determine if the offending allergen that your horse is reacting to is definitely *Culicoides*. This can be useful if appropriate treatments and management changes for sweet itch appear not to be working. The intradermal skin test involves injecting a small amount of multiple different antigens into your horse's skin and monitoring their response to each of them. Blood tests look for hypersensitivity to a range of allergens too, and although more easily performed, are not always as accurate as intradermal skin testing. Both testing methods can be useful in determining exactly what your horse is reacting to.

How Can we prevent it?

Once your horse has had a hypersensitivity reaction to *Culicoides* it will often react more excessively with each subsequent exposure. Therefore, it is important to reduce the likelihood of your horse experiencing fly bites as soon as you realise that they are reacting badly to them. This can be achieved using multiple management changes.

Stabling can be a useful tool to prevent unnecessary exposure to *Culicoides* species. Avoiding turnout in the early morning and late evening when flies are most active can be a useful starting point. Efforts should also be made to avoid turning horses out to pasture in areas where flies are likely to be abundant, such as next to rivers and streams or bordering areas of forestry. Mesh fly rugs can also prove very useful in the prevention of fly bites but are not 100% effective and should not be the only measure relied upon. Turnout into windy pasture areas can also help to decrease the number of flies present.



There are a number of fly repellent sprays on the market for horses which can be purchased from your local equestrian merchants. While most of these are very useful, it is important to monitor your horse for any signs of adverse effects related to the use of these sprays such as signs of allergic reaction or worsening of sweet itch symptoms. If any of these are noted, then use of the offending spray should be quickly stopped. Insecticides containing pyrethroid or permethrin are also very useful and can be applied at varying intervals to prevent fly bites. Deosect is one such product commonly dispensed from Avonvale.

Continued.....

Sweet Itch Continued

Sweet Itch Continued.....

Increasing the levels of fatty acids and omega 6 in your horses' diet has also been shown to reduce itching. Feedstuffs such as flax seed oil can be used to achieve this. Alongside all of the above approaches, anti-itch shampoos are increasingly becoming available on the market and in some cases work very well in reducing clinical signs related to sweet itch.

What can my vet do to help?

In cases where management changes have not been effective, treatment may be required to ease your horse's symptoms. Often steroid injections are used to down-regulate the body's response. The use of corticosteroids should only be considered in cases with particularly severe clinical signs and for short periods of time. Therefore, it is important to ensure that management changes have either been attempted or are in the process of being phased in before steroid use is considered.

Antihistamines can also be a useful option when attempting to manage your horse's allergic response. However, it can be challenging to administer the correct dose due to the current tablet sizes available.

If you have any questions regarding Sweet Itch or any other skin complaints that your horse is experiencing, please do not hesitate to contact the clinic to speak to one of our experienced equine vets.

Update on Equine Herpes Virus-1

As many of you will have already heard, there has been an outbreak of neurological equine herpes virus-1 (EHV-1) in Valencia during the sunshine tour.

EHV-1 usually causes fever and mild respiratory disease, however it can occasionally cause abortions in pregnant mares and more rarely, the devastating neurological signs that are affecting horses in Valencia.

EHV-1 is spread via respiratory droplets, and via physical contact with the virus. Given the COVID restrictions at the time of writing, spread from these horses into the wider UK population is unlikely, but as competitions resume on 29th March, we urge horse owners to remain vigilant and look out for the following signs:

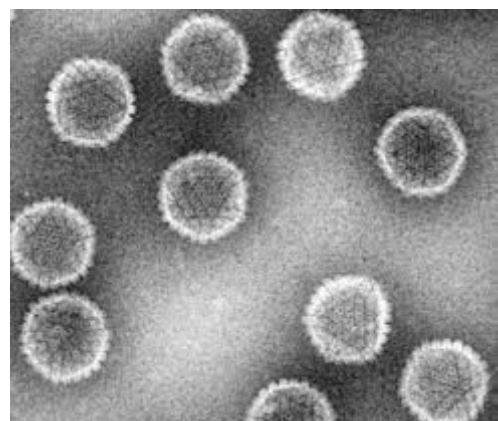
- Fever
- Lethargy
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing
- Abortion in pregnant mares or birth of weak foals
- Incoordination or weakness

Horses that are returning from the sunshine tour should isolate and be tested in accordance with the FEI guidance.

It should be noted that vaccination should not be carried out in affected or in-contact horses, as there is some evidence that antigen-antibody complexes play a role in the development of neurological disease.



Image courtesy of Horse and Hound



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