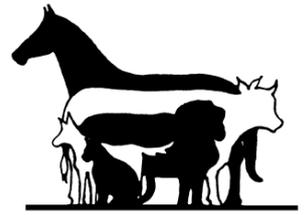


Main Ridge Veterinary Clinic



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Equine Lumbar (Back) Pain

My horse has a sore back!

The diagnosis or symptoms of back pain in the horse is a commonly reported problem. Symptoms can be many or varied. Commonly reported symptoms of “back pain” include:

- Reactivity to palpation (touch/pressure) in the lumbar region
- Resentment to saddle/girth
- Resentment to work, especially higher intensity work (i.e. speed/turning/jumping/ground work)
- Gait abnormalities/lameness, especially in the hind limbs
- Reduced mobility and flexion in the lumbar/sacro-iliac/pelvic region

Commonly there is a history of recent prolonged or high intensity/impact work

So does back pain really exist?

The most important thing to remember is that “back pain” in the horse is **often** a symptom of another **non** “back” related issue, rather than a primary musculo-skeletal problem originating in the lumbar region. The commonly misdiagnosed “kissing spine” – a condition resulting in inflammation between dorsal vertebral processes in the back is actually very rare, and can only reliably be diagnosed via diagnostic nerve blocks and/or scintigraphy (bone scan).

Causes

So what are the causes of the “symptoms” of back pain? These include, but are not restricted to:

- Secondary musculoskeletal pain/inflammation/ from:
 - Hock (tarsal) issues (e.g. inflammation/arthritis)
 - Sacro-iliac (SI) issues
 - Stifle issues
 - Hind-leg hoof issues or imbalance
- Abdominal discomfort (e.g. ulcers)
- Primary back pain (inflammation, muscular tears, arthritis)
 - Ill-fitting saddle
 - Kissing spine
 - Arthritis/”wear-and-tear”
 - Excessive weight
 - Excessive/high-impact work load (e.g. jumping)

- Nerve issues
- Other underlying systemic issues

Diagnosis

The diagnosis of the factors causing “back pain” in your animal can be easy or complex, and require a thorough history. The work-up will likely also involve a full lameness examination (which can include gait assessment (walk/trot/lunge/canter), diagnostic nerve blocks, ultrasound examination, x-rays, MRI, CT, referral to a hospital, etc).

Treatments

Treatment(s) will vary with relative cause(s). They may include:

- Conservative treatments such as:
 - Rest
 - Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (e.g. phenylbutazone/”bute”)
 - Refitting a saddle
 - Corrective farriery
 - Strengthening exercises (low-level hill work, water work, stepping over obstacles, cavalettis, etc.)
 - Massage
 - Acupuncture
 - Joint protective/general anti-inflammatory treatments (Pentosan/HA/4Cyte)
 - Joint supplements
 - Shock-wave therapy
- More intensive/invasive treatments are often necessary, and may include:
 - Joint injections (cortico-steroids(cortisone)/HA/IRAP/PRP)
 - Surgery
 - Treatments of other underlying systemic causes

Sometimes treatment can result in immediate improvement and allow a resumption of your horse/pony’s work, however sometimes diagnosis and treatment can take considerable time, effort and rehabilitation.

If at any time you are worried about your horse/pony’s condition, or if you have any further questions, please contact the Main Ridge Veterinary Clinic on (03) 5989 6232.