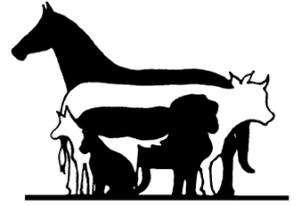


# Main Ridge Veterinary Clinic



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## My horse is choking!



Meet Tiffany. She is a gracefully ageing 29yo Arab mare who enjoys the finer things in life. She is also a repeat offender when it comes to oesophageal impaction; commonly known as choke! Despite being on a strictly controlled diet and having regular dental check ups, she manages to sneak, steal and gulp food she is not supposed to! And as a result – she regularly gets that food stuck halfway down her oesophagus – i.e. Choke! She has managed to choke approximately 4 times in the past 12 months!

Her latest episode occurred after she snuck a mouthful of her neighbour's chaff and managed to gulp down a handful of pine needles also! We attended her property after her owner found her presenting with some classic symptoms of choke – she was drooling, had profuse nasal discharge containing saliva and some food stuff, was regularly extending her neck and was showing only marginal interest in eating/drinking. A firm mass the size of a lemon was palpable about halfway down her neck on the near (left) side.

Treatment included sedation, and a diagnosis of oesophageal obstruction/choke was confirmed by passing a nasogastric stomach tube that could not be advanced beyond the palpable mass of food in her neck. Despite multiple attempts at irrigation and to advance the bolus of food into her stomach, no progress was made. At this point, anti-inflammatories and smooth muscle relaxants were administered. A revisit several hours later showed no progress, stomach tubing was again unsuccessful and Tiffany then underwent endoscopic examination. This involved passing a camera down her oesophagus to visualise the obstruction, and to attempt to break it down with biopsy forceps. Although good visualisation was achieved, after many slow hours little progress was achieved in breaking apart the food bolus. Biopsy

forceps are designed, as the name suggests, to take small biopsies of tissue – no more than a couple of millimetres in size. Imagine trying to pull apart a tennis ball of compacted food stuff, one millimetre at a time! At this point, Tiffany was referred to a specialist equine hospital.



Fig 1: Food/pine needle bolus obstructing oesophagus



Fig 2: Biopsy forceps breaking apart the blockage

At the hospital, after several days of treatment including supportive IV fluids, pain relief and smooth muscle relaxants, additional medications and multiple frustrating attempts and hours spent trying to break the food blockage apart with an endoscope and biopsy forceps, Tiffany managed to swallow the obstruction of her own accord! Happy days! Because of the prolonged amount of time the obstruction had persisted, there was considerable irritation and ulceration to the mucosal surface of her oesophagus. Over time however, and with supportive protective medication, this resolved and healed normally.

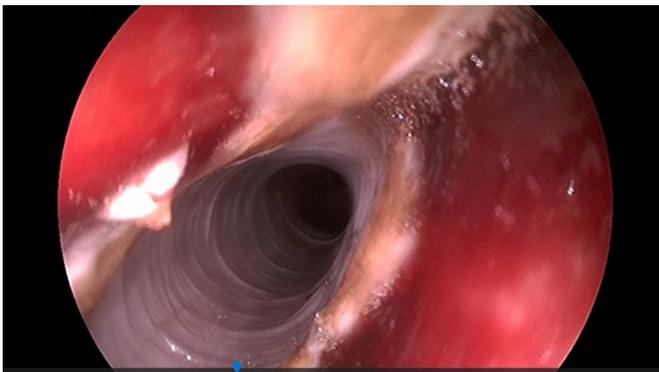


Fig 3: Ulcerated oesophagus



Fig 4. Healthy oesophagus with lesion resolved, 1 month later

Happily, Tiffany is now back home again. She is under even closer surveillance and food restrictions, as well as more thorough dental treatments, so try and prevent this happening again.