



## September 2024 Choke

Choke is a relatively common condition that occurs when there is a blockage of the horse's oesophagus with either food or a foreign body such as wood or plastic. A common culprit can be unsoaked feed. It can appear incredibly scary. However choke is rarely life threatening and often self resolves.

Signs that your horse may be suffering from the choke include:

- difficulty/repeated attempts at swallowing
- stretching/arching of the neck
- coughing food & saliva
- discharging from the nose
- drooling
- not eating
- occasionally a lump may be seen or felt on the left side of the neck
- rolling
- distress
- pawing at the ground

We diagnose choke usually with the history and clinical signs. This can be confirmed by passing a stomach tube through one of the horse's nostrils and feeling resistance before we reach the horse's stomach. We can often dislodge the blockage with the stomach tube. We sometimes also need to pass fluid down it to clear it. In rare cases some horses may need to be endoscoped to visual and move the blockage. Passing anything through the horse's nose can cause a nose bleed. These nose bleeds can appear very dramatic but they stop on their own and are not a serious concern.

Seek veterinary assistance if the choke doesn't resolve quickly.

If the choke does resolve quickly our veterinary team are still happy to advise you as to your next steps. If the episode has been prolonged we still advise your horse is assessed by a vet.

Risks post a choking episode include respiratory infection if the horse has inhaled any food matter. Hence it is important to monitor twice a day that your horse has a temperature below 38.5C and a respiratory rate at rest of below 18bpm for the three days following an episode. If your horse's choke episode has been very prolonged with them going down, we may start antibiotics immediately.

There is also a risk of the horse's oesophagus being inflamed making them more likely to have another choke episode, therefore you may be advised (depending on the duration of the episode) to starve your horse for 12 hours or so post the event and your horse may require anti inflammatories.

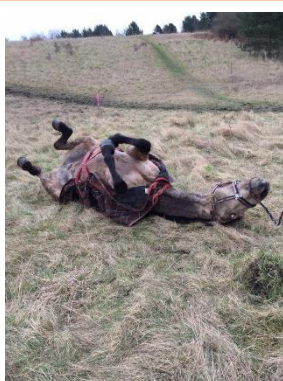
There is a very small risk of perforation of the oesophagus with choke, which is why it is important you do not try to pass anything down your horse's throat yourself but instead seek veterinary assistance.

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Some chokes respond well to medical management, so depending on their severity we may just give them two injections, one to relax the muscle of the oesophagus and another as an anti-inflammatory.

Others may require sedation to calm them down.

As discussed previously passing a stomach tube will resolve the majority of cases.



If your horse has repeated choking episodes, it can signal an underlying problem. Most commonly this is due to a dental issue preventing the horse chewing correctly, however there can also be underlying conditions affecting the movement of the horse's stomach and or oesophagus. For example Friesians can suffer from megaoesophagus which is where their oesophagus is abnormally enlarged, but other breeds can be affected by this as well.

The only way to diagnose a stomach or oesophageal issue is to gastroscop the horse. For which we normally starve the horse overnight.

To prevent your horse getting choke you can:

- Ensure regular dental checks (minimum yearly but depending on what your horse's teeth are like they may need to be done every 3 months)
- Ensure any soaked feeds are soaked for long enough and with enough fluid
- Ensure any feed bags are locked well away with the horse unable to gain access of their own accord.
- Add chaff to feeds to slow the rate at which the horse eats it. (Unless advised not to by your vet)
- Introduce new hard feeds slowly.
- Avoid feeding hard feed in fields full of loose horses as this can encourage horses to bolt food.
- Remove debris such as bits of plastic from your horse's field or stable.

### Practice News

This month a team from the practice are taking on the 3 peaks challenge; the highest mountains in Scotland, England and Wales. Emelie, Bryony and Stuart will be climbing Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon within a 24 hour period and they really need your support. They are raising money for fantastic charities, please see more information and donate following the links on our facebook page.