

EQUINE NEWSLETTER

Horse Identification & Microchips



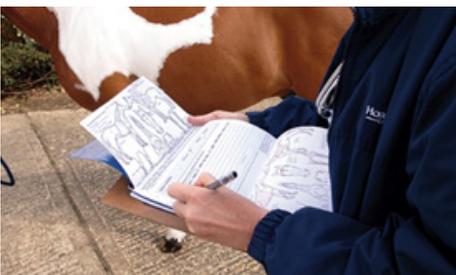
As you may have heard, by 1st October 2020 (12th February 2021 for Wales) it will be a legal requirement that all horses in England and Wales are microchipped, regardless of age.

The aim of this legislation is to provide better equine traceability and ensure that abandoned, lost or stolen horses can be reunited with owners more easily than previously.

The new equine central database can be accessed at www.equineregister.co.uk and here, with your horse's microchip number, you can check the details held by the passport issuing organisation of your horse, including whether he/she is signed out of the food chain. There is also some very useful help guides including information on duplicate passports and foreign passports.

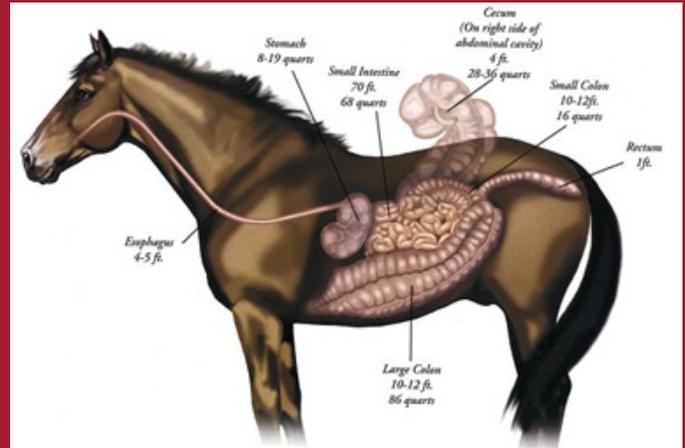
It should be remembered that all foals must be microchipped and have a passport issued within 6 months of birth or by 30th November of the year of birth, whichever is sooner. It is against the law to have more than one passport per horse, if a passport is lost efforts to locate it and/or identify the original passport issuing organisation should be made.

The passport should always be with your horse so that when we examine your horse we can look at it, if required, before giving treatment. This is also applicable if your horse is out on loan. The keeper must be in possession of the passport (a photocopy is not acceptable). You can let passport issuing organisations know your horse is going out on loan.



If there is actual change of ownership the passport issuing organisation should be notified within 30 days of this happening.

The Digestive Tract



The equine; horse, pony, or donkey, differs from cattle in that digestion of forage takes place in the hind gut vs the fore-stomachs (rumen and reticulum) in sheep and cattle.

The hay passes through the oesophagus, the relatively small stomach, and small intestine before reaching the large 'coma-shaped' caecum and large intestines (dorsal & ventral colon). The caecum and large intestine contain microbes (bacteria, fungi and protozoa) that work to breakdown the fibrous part of the forage (cellulose and some of the lignin). This fibre is broken down into volatile fatty acids that are taken through the gut lining and transported via the blood stream to the liver.

Forage plays a vital part in regulating the flow of food along the digestive tract. Due to the design of the gastrointestinal tract (GI tract) the presence of forage slows down the flow of concentrates and fresh young grass so that the caecum and large intestines are not presented with too much of these foods at any one time. The caecum is designed to handle forage or insoluble carbohydrates. If cereals (concentrates) without being accompanied with forage, passes to the caecum the rich food can upset the bacteria within the caecum and large intestine causing rapid fermentation. Excess acid is produced in a section of the GI tract that should be very near pH neutral or even mildly alkaline. This can potentially cause an array of problems; e.g. colic (mild to severe) hind gut ulceration and endotoxin release leading to laminitis.

A lack of forage can lead to boredom and stress and is believed to have an association with increased stereotypical behaviour, weaving, crib-biting and box walking!

Forage

Forage is simply the fibrous parts of plants eaten by livestock and horses. It should form the bulk of a horse's diet when it doesn't have access to pasture.

This would normally mean hay, haylage and sometimes straw (donkeys) or any combination of these. The other part of a horse's diet is referred to as concentrates. These days it can be difficult to make out the dividing line between forage and concentrate. Some forages can be found ground, pelleted and bagged and have the appearance of a concentrate. These are often the fibre nuts which are particularly useful for horses, ponies and donkeys with dental problems because the forage, in essence, has been 'pre-chewed' for them.

The other type of forage that can be found in a packaged/bagged form are the chaffs. These are essentially chopped hays and or straws that come, molassed or unmolassed with or without vitamin, mineral +/- protein pellets depending on the product.

• How much forage does a horse need on a daily basis?

Typically an adult horse will consume between 1-2 % of its body weight (bwt) in forage a day. This means that a 500 kg horse will consume 5-10 kg of dry forage a day. A horse grazing pasture at 20-30 % dry matter (70-80% moisture) will consume 15-30 kg daily because of the extra moisture present in the grass.

It is good practice to take a section/wedge of hay and frequently weigh the sections so that we are aware of how much we are actually feeding. For horses in good condition and moderate work 2 % of bwt is probably appropriate. Horses and ponies on a weight reduction program will require no more than 1.5 % of bwt in forage. It is important that the forage is spread evenly throughout the day so that it mimics natural grazing. Horses will normally graze for at least 16 hours out of 24.

• To cope with the forage, good teeth and regular dental check-ups are essential.

Dry vs wet conservation

Hay or straw are dried forage. By removing the majority of the water so that the forage is > 85 % dry matter (DM) bacteria and fungi (moulds) find it hard to multiply. If these forages become damp, they will deteriorate.

Haylage is semi-wilted grass that is conserved by sealing the grass in polythene wrapping so that the naturally occurring microbes on the grass ferment the sugars within the grass producing acids which lower the pH within the bag pickling the grass. Silage is unwilted grass and has a higher moisture content than haylage and a lower pH (more acidic). This is rarely fed to horses.

• Pros and cons of feeding hay vs haylage:

If made well and stored well, both types of preservation should have a reduced risk of mould growth. Haylage is often fed to horses with respiratory problems because, being damp, it is less dusty. However, once a bag has been opened, it is advised that it is fed within a 24 hour period because the down-side is that once the haylage is exposed to the air, moulds will begin to grow that are invisible to the naked eye. These ideally shouldn't be eaten but importantly they are breathed into the horse via its nose as it eats.

• Types of hay and haylage:

Traditionally hay was made from meadow grass that contained a wide variety of grasses and herbs. They were often quite soft, not especially high in calories but usually contained a broad range of vitamins and minerals due to the different types of plants the hay contained.

Over recent decades these meadows have declined and most hay is made from so called 'improved' pastures. These have been sown with more productive grasses such as ryegrass, timothy and legumes such as clover. These pastures might be good for raising livestock on but are generally too rich for many horses, especially native ponies and donkeys. There is growing evidence that a pasture containing mixed herbage is better for the health of livestock too.

There has been increasing use of the legume alfalfa, also known as lucerne. Its popularity has grown because although high in energy it is particularly high in protein.

It is essential, whether you feed hay or haylage, that it is bright, clean and fresh and that plenty of fresh clean water is available at all times.

• Advantages of high temperature steaming

- > 100°C get 95% + reduction in respiratory pathogens
- kills bacteria and mould, even post soaking
- Highly palatable, no loss of minerals or protein
- Long shelf-life post steamed hay and haylage

Steamers can be expensive but it is possible to make your own. It is important that the container is not too tall. Some are made out of refuge bins with is not ideal. This is because by the time the steam reaches the top of the bin it has cooled down meaning that the hay has been dampened but no pathogens are killed. The hay is often quite wet and unpleasant to handle. Correctly steamed hay is barely damp to the touch.

As the winter draws on and the temperatures get colder it is often tempting to feed more concentrates and apply more rugs. Eating forage provides an excellent internal heat source due to the fermentation that occurs in the hindgut. The heat dissipates into the abdomen and is picked up by the blood stream and carried throughout the body acting like an internal hot water bottle. This is far safer and more effective than adding high calorie foods.

Emergencies / Out of hours

In the unfortunate event that your animal requires veterinary attention out-of-hours, please dial the usual office number, where you will be given the telephone number of the on-duty vet.

It may be useful to keep a pen and paper handy to take this number down.

On the rare occasion that the duty vet is out of telephone reception, your call will be received by a helpful member of our answering team, who will ensure someone attends the emergency as soon as possible.

The answering team at Kernow can be contacted directly on 01432 381 440, if for any reason you cannot get hold of the duty vet.

HEREFORD: 01432 351471 • BROMYARD: 01885 488440 • LEDBURY: 01531 806129 •  @belmontfarmvets

Clinical Vets: Dominic Alexander • Will Allman • Mike Bellamy • Andrew Cooke • Nick Gibbon • James Hipperson • Hannah Mitchell
Alex O'Malley • Matthew Pugh • Caroline Rank • Amelia Stevens • Harry Walby • Charlotte Watkins

Support staff: Michelle Harris • Sybil Legge • Laura Langford • Alice Mainwaring • Ros O'Sullivan • Sophie Powell • Andrea Smith
Pam Strange • Harriet Turner • Millie Whitlock