

Choke



What is Choke?

Choke is when the oesophagus (food pipe) which runs between the mouth and the stomach of the horse gets blocked. It usually happens when the horse is eating and may cause the horse to become suddenly distressed. The trachea (windpipe) remains clear and the horse is able to breathe normally.

How do I know that my horse has Choke?

- Your horse will intermittently retch and produce saliva mixed with food from its nose.
- The horse may become quite distressed and repeatedly produce pools of fluid from the nose.
- The symptoms will start when or soon after your horse has eaten. Hard food fed dry is the commonest cause of choke although it can occur when unchopped fruit or vegetables or even dry hay is being eaten.



Saliva mixed with food produced from the nose of a horse with choke

What do I do if I think my horse has Choke?

- Take all the feed away from the horse.
- Leave the horse in a quiet, calm environment.
- In the majority of cases the obstruction clears quickly and the retching symptoms described above will stop.

When do I call the vet?

If the choke has not cleared after 10 minutes then contact the surgery for advice from the vets. Depending on the circumstances a visit from the vet may be required.

Penn Equine Vets

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How will the vet help my horse?

- If your horse is distressed the vet may administer sedation which will relax your horse and also encourage lowering of the head. Sometimes muscle relaxants may be given and in rare cases a tube will be passed down the oesophagus to flush the obstruction away.
- Most chokes clear quickly but if the obstruction continues it may be necessary to administer fluids intravenously to prevent dehydration while we wait for the obstruction to clear.
- Occasionally the vet will need to use an endoscope (camera) to view the obstruction, check that there is no damage to the wall of the oesophagus and also to look in the horse's airway to check that he hasn't breathed in any food material.

What do I do once the choke has cleared?

- You can reintroduce water as soon as the obstruction has cleared.
- Once you are happy that your horse is swallowing water normally you can reintroduce solid food.
- Add extra water to hard feeds and ensure products like sugar beet are thoroughly soaked before feeding.
- Some horses get choke because they have dental problems which do not allow them to chew their food properly before swallowing.
- We would recommend a dental examination for any horse that has suffered from a bout of choke to check if dental disease was the underlying cause of the problem.
- In older horses, or in those horses with known dental problems, a permanent change to the feeding regime may be recommended to avoid future bouts of choke.



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