



Arthritis in the older horse

Although arthritis in the older horse is a similar disease process to arthritis in the younger horse, the consequences in older horses are often more detrimental, and can deteriorate to the point of being a life threatening condition. Once the geriatric horse is heavily laden with arthritis, it may no longer believe it can get up, and thus will not try to lie down. Sadly, these are the horses that do eventually go down and cannot rise, due to pain in their joints and weakness in their muscles. If they are down too long, the weight of the body compresses the legs on the down side to the point that the circulation to the muscles becomes impaired. This results in the muscles becoming numb and weak (or as we would say— “fall asleep”). If this occurs, the horse’s prognosis for recovery is very poor. Even if people were able to raise the horse up, they have to keep it up long enough for circulation and muscle strength to be re-established. Without the use of a sling and hoist, this is usually impossible and the horses have to be euthanized. Therefore, in order to avoid this avoidable outcome, it is very important to have an assessment and treatment of your geriatric friend’s arthritis, regardless of whether the he or she is retired or still being actively ridden.

There are stepping stones to the evaluation of arthritis. First, you have to know whether or not your horse is exhibiting clinical signs. As the horse’s owner, you know your animal the best. Therefore, you are going to be the first line of defense against arthritis. If your horse has a difficult time getting up, laying down, turning, or picking up its

legs, these may be signs of a problem. Another sign could be that your riding begins to feel different, or your horse has a different attitude about exercise and or is reluctant to work. In these same horses, you may hear some “cracks and pops” when they move and bend their legs.

This might even occur when you are picking up their feet to clean them, or the farrier to trim them.

A second line of defense may be your fellow barn-mate or trainer. Often, different individuals are quick to notice changes in your horse’s movement. Your farrier may make a comment during trimming or shoeing that your horse just doesn’t pick up or keep its legs up as cooperatively as it did before. Should these changes be observed a lameness evaluation should be performed.

The last and most conclusive determination of arthritic change in your geriatric animal is an annual check up. Early detection of arthritis is critical. The old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” summarizes it well. If you notice any of the above symptoms in your horse, then a lameness evaluation is indicated for its future wellness.

This evaluation will be followed up with a management/treatment plan that will contain several options based on the status of each individual. In certain cases, radiographs (or x-rays) are taken to determine the stage of arthritis in particular joints.

Treatment might include anti-inflammatories to decrease joint pain, thus making it easier for your horse to be more active.

Movement, itself, is one of the treatments for these individuals.

Once your horse is sore, ceases to move, and gets stiff, it resist getting up and down, thus not rest as well. A horse that does not move loses lean muscle, which relieves joints of weight bearing, and it also enables a horse to get up and down.



Sooooooooooooo,

Exercise-Exercise-Exercise!

As a side note, older horses have a more difficult time being outside when it is wet and cold. If it is slippery, they are more likely to fall and/or not be able to get up.

Lean muscle can be developed with the use of products known as anabolic steroids. Unlike corticosteroids, they do not have the possible side effects of decreasing your immune system or increasing the possibility of laminitis/founder. They are the substances that body builders take to “bulk up”. They are administered once a month, and maybe given for the duration of the horse’s life. Sometimes, these medications “bump” the horse up so that it begins to use its atrophied muscles, to the point that those muscles are then able to recruit, stimulate and develop other muscles to help the horse maintain enough strength on its own, without the use of medications.

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Arthritis in Older Horses



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Cartilage aid is also a factor in caring for the older arthritic horse. Adequan®, a polysulfated glycosaminoglycan, is a product provides cartilage protection and maintenance. The product is given in the muscle every four days for a series of 6-8 shots. There are other brands, such as Ichon® and Chondroprotec®, that are also PSGAGs). In essence, these products form a band-aid in the joint. They accomplish this by filling the eroded areas of the cartilage, thus protecting and cushioning the underlying subchondral bone. This is called “resurfacing” the joint. The PSGAGs are the only products manufactured that do this resurfacing. (They are also “free radical” scavengers.)

Without cartilage every step is painful. Imagine walking and the bones in your leg grinding on each other with every step you take. **“Bone on bone pain”.**

Another way to protect the arthritic geriatric is by promoting good quality synovial fluid production in the joints. Synovial fluid (joint fluid) is a source of nutrients, as well a pathway for removal of substances for the joint. Good synovial fluid is thick and clear. Thickness of joint fluid is also known as viscosity. A good viscosity is important, because it can carry away more wastes, as well as bring more nutrients to the site. Furthermore, you can think of good quality joint fluid as being thick motor oil. Compared to just plain water, motor oil provides much more lubrication and protection. Just

like old cars which need to have another quart of oil added occasionally, old horses need to have their joint fluid replenished occasionally. Poor quality joint fluid is analogous to using plain water to lubricate your car’s engine. It neither protects nor lubricates the engine as well as a thick motor oil would. Obviously, like motor oil protects and lubricates the surfaces of an engine, good quality joint fluid does the same for the cartilages of the joint.

Lastly, there are numerous oral supplements that provide some joint maintenance as well as relief. Oral supplements can simulate joint fluid production, take down inflammation and act as free radical scavengers. The amount of relief that any horse obtains from these, varies between each individual. These products may be acquired through your veterinarian, your local tack and feed store, or on the world wide web. A word of caution to all internet buyers however. Products acquired online may not actually contain the listed ingredients.

To recap trust your heart. If your horse appears to be slowing down, have a lameness evaluation, and consider supplementation.

Keep your geriatric moving!

JOINT FLUID

Remember: Your horse is like a car. To keep him/her moving with a lot of mileage, you have to make sure to change the oil every once in a while, and not just keep it parked in one place. -Dr White (although heavily inspired by the many Dr. Mayisms)

Equine Tidbit — E.T.

Starting with this newsletter, we are going to be providing you with a quick “Equine Tibit” (ET). An ET is a small piece of advice that we can give you as a quick reference in times of potential trouble for you and your horse.

The ET will have a small flow chart that will help you decide when and what you can do yourself, or when you should call your veterinarian for help.

When in doubt however, we are here all year long, 24 hours a day.

Today’s topic will cover the **“Down Horse”**. The reason a horse is down, maybe due to something extremely serious, such as a colic, broken leg, weak arthritic geriatric, neurological problem or something simple like a horse that is cast or sun bathing.

More often than not, the history of the day the horse has had, will provide huge clues as to the reason for the horse being down. If the horse hasn’t eaten any of its food, appears bloated, is biting at its side, or there is no manure in

the stall, then more than likely the horse is down due to colic.

If one of the legs on the horse is larger than normal, and/or is anatomically misshaped, then perhaps the horse has a leg injury.

Neurological problems are another serious cause for your horse being down. The horse may not be able to feel where its legs are in space, or the horse maybe ataxic. Ataxia is incoordination which results in wobbly drunk-like walking. Lying down, in such a case, may provide a steady environment.

If the horse is down, with its body close to a wall, and struggling to get up, then it may just be cast. Horses that have been cast for a while may not thrash due to fatigue from having tried to get up over and over again. Due to its efforts in trying to get up, the horse may have abrasions on its head and legs. Once you move the horse away from the obstacle impeding its ability to rise, they will usually get right up and act normal = eating, drinking, passing manure, and moving around. Make sure, once up, that the horse didn’t injure itself during the struggle.

Once in a while, you will see a horse lying flat out in the field motionless. They lay there so still that it appears as though they have “passed away”. Most of the time, if you wait long enough, you’ll see their chest move with respiration. If not, usually a loud noise, a human approaching, or the promise of food gets them to their feet. If no stimuli awakens the horse to its feet, call us.

Regardless of the cause, a down horse that has difficulty rising or can not get up at all, is a horse that requires attention. Horses should not lay down on one side longer than 45 minutes. Once the horse is down that long, rising becomes more of a problem. As described earlier, the down legs will “fall asleep”. If you flip the horse over to try and “wake them up” the opposite legs (which are now the down legs) can “fall asleep”. In such cases, you may never get ahead and intervention with a crane and sling may be needed to lift the horse and allow all 4 legs to “wake up”.

FIRST AID FOR THE DOWN HORSE: *UP SEE DAISY*

Safety first.
Maintain awareness of your horse's legs when attempting to roll him over. If you get hurt, who is going to help the horse?

Now that we've discussed reasons for your horse being down, let's work on getting it up!

CAUTION: before you attempt to raise a horse, remember there may be a serious musculoskeletal or neurological reason why it is down. Evaluate the horse with a thorough eye before attempting this procedure.

Get help!

One or more persons can grab handfuls of mane, or the halter and lead rope, one or more grab the tail. Pull the horse far enough away from the obstruction to allow it to rise on its own. The horse may jump up quickly, so be sure you get out of the way as soon as possible to avoid being hurt.

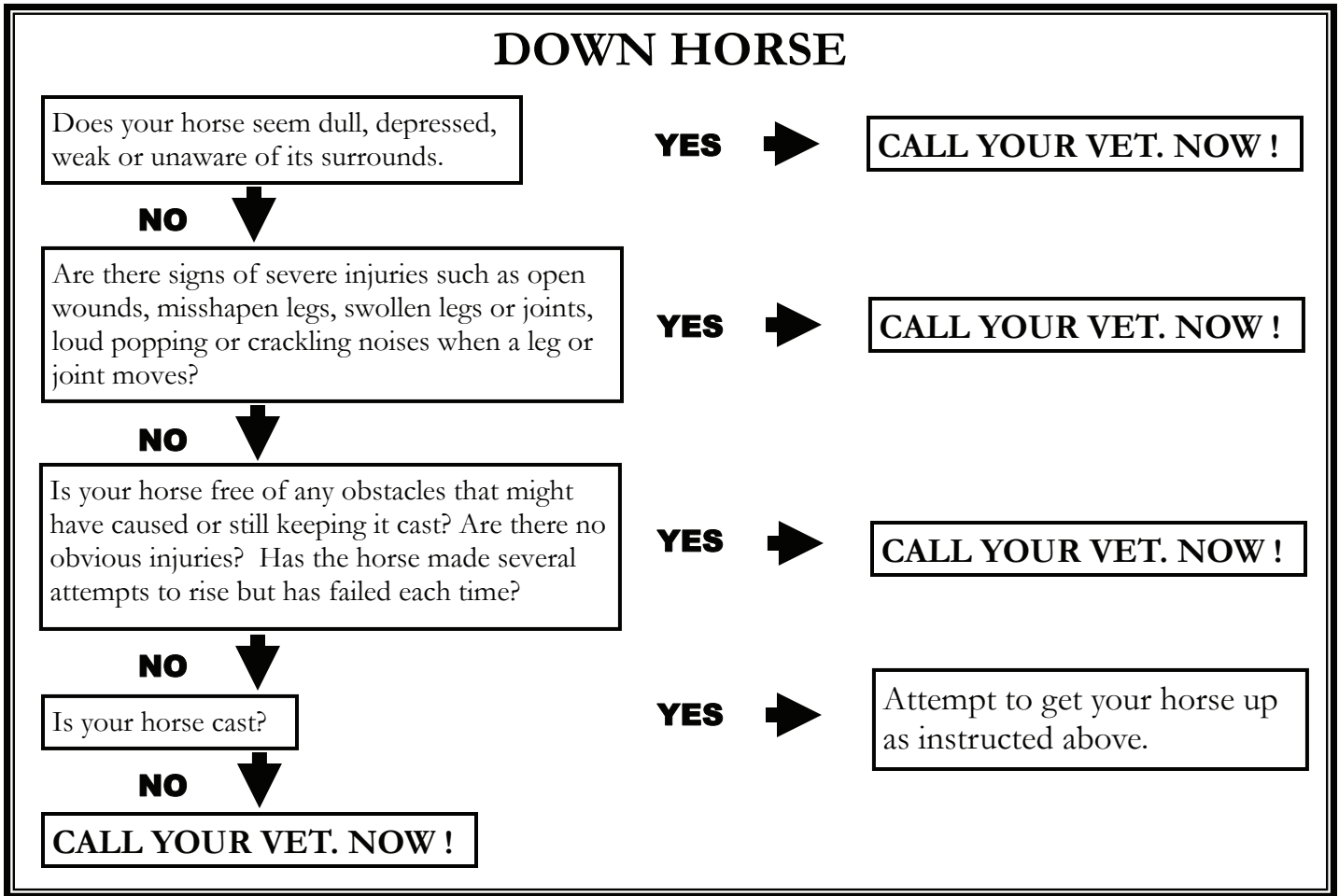
If this doesn't work, get two ropes. Loop one rope around the down front leg and one around the down hind leg. The down legs are the ones closest to the ground.

Be careful not to get kicked by the upper legs!

Slide the front leg rope above the knee, and the hind leg rope above the hock.

Pull on both of the ropes at the SAME TIME.

Be careful that the horse's hooves do not hit you as it rolls over.



HOW DOES DAISY GET UP ?



STEP 1

Positions herself onto her sternum, with rear legs up underneath her.

STEP 2

Extends her front legs out in front. Swings her head and neck for balance.

STEP 3

Pushes up with her rear legs while, Bracing with her front legs.

Emergency Animal Rescue (E.A.R.) is a nonprofit organization in Ramona. They were a valued presence in the fires this past fall, and have been doing much unrecognized work through out San Diego County. Ask them about their life saving *Personalized Evaluation Planning Program* for individuals and their animals. Email or call them for details.

E.A.R. is the ONLY rescue group in San Diego County that you can count on if you have a horse that is down and physically cannot get up on its own. As discussed in this newsletter, being down for too long is often the cause of demise for some horses. Therefore, the Equine Animal Rescue plays a very important role in our horse industry, and possibly in your horse's life. To accomplish this, E.A.R. many times needs the assistance of special horse slings, and heavy machinery. We hope to raise money for the additional sling they need, and we need backhoe operators to volunteer to help on at least one call a year. It can make the difference between a horse living or dying.

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FIRST AID CLINIC:

A 100% hands-on First Aid Clinic will be taught by Drs. Kevin May and Ashley L. White. It will be limited to 10 people per session, so reserve you space by calling: 619-444-9340. We are suggesting a \$20 donation for attending this clinic. Of the profits, 100% is going to the **E.A.R.** for the purchase of a new sling, which will help down horses, in our community, get up again.

The clinic will be on Sunday, February 10th, at the Triple S Horse Ranch, 15476 El Monte Rd in Lakeside. There will be two sessions lasting 1.5 hours each. The first will begin at 10:30 am and the second at 1:00 pm. Lunch will be provided from

Noon to 1:00 pm for attendees, so please let us know if you will be attending the lunch. During the lunch period there will be a surprise presentation by the Doctors of E.C.V.V.H.!



GOOD LUCK TO OUR MEGAN !

As life's highway takes its different turns, people often take different exit ramps. We have been fortunate to have worked with and befriended Megan Kim, our equine office manager.

As of January 19th, Megan will be moving on from El Cajon Valley Veterinary Hospital. She has been a wonderful asset to the practice, and will be greatly missed. We wish her the very best in her new career!