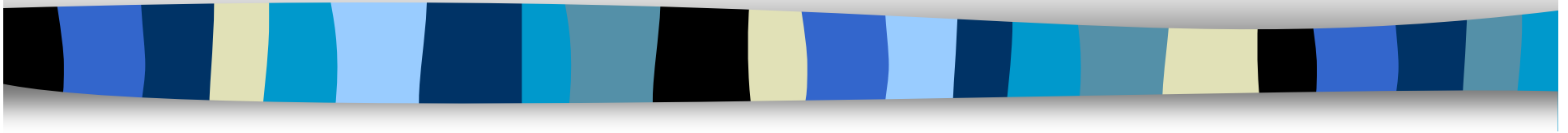


Care of the Senior Horse



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“Old age is not a disease”

- 20% of the horse population is 15 years of age or older
- Aging is poorly understood, different breeds age at different rates
- Old horses are susceptible to a different types of diseases



Comparative Geriatrics

- First year of horses' life = 10 human yr.
- After that each horse yr. = 2 human yr.
- A 8-10 year old horse is like a 30 year old person
- A 20 year old horse is like a 50 year old person
- A 30 year old horse is like a 70 year old person



What happens when we age?

- Reduction in immune response
- Decreased output of certain hormones
- Muscle atrophy
- Increased incidence of tumors
- Loss of pigment in hair
- Loss of senses such as hearing, sight, and taste

Body Condition Scoring

- 1-3 Poor-Thin



- 4 Can see ribs, vertebra ridge evident
- 5 Back flat, can't see ribs, but can feel them
- 6 Crease down back, fat deposits
- 7-9 Fleshy - Extremely fat



Gauging Condition of Older Horses

- Does the health limit participation in strenuous sports?
- Does the horse have trouble walking, trotting, or cantering?
- Trouble bending or moving in a tight circle? Backing?
- Does the health limit kinds or amounts of moderate activities - trail/equitation?
- Exhibit trouble walking uphill or jumping?
- Periods of intermittent lameness?



Digestive Problems

“Things Change”

- Teeth!
- Up to 20% reduced capacity to absorb nutrients
- Decreased saliva - may increase risk of choke
- Colic - particularly lipomas and impactions
- Parasites



Older horse diets

- Higher amount of quality protein - 12-14%
 - Ca <1% and .3-.4 % P
- More easily digested fiber sources
 - rely on soft, leafy, immature grasses
- Increased trace minerals & vitamins
- Use formulated specialized rations
- use mashes of pellets or extruded diets



Teeth

- Horses are continuous erupters- the teeth never stop growing
- Process of chewing keeps molars level
- Abnormal chewing may cause multiple problems such as wave mouth, hooks, loss of teeth, overgrowth, and split teeth
- Older horses need frequent dental exams and dental floating as necessary



Teeth Complications

- Horse outlives teeth - roots have no enamel
- teeth fall out - upper first molars first
- teeth shift- gaps allow gingivitis or periodontal disease
- bacterial sinusitis results in nasal discharge and swollen-looking
- shear mouth molars up to 60° angle



Skin tumors

- Squamous cell carcinoma
- Melanoma
 - Very common in horses that were born black or brown and then turn grey over time
- Sarcoid and papilloma (warts) are actually quite rare in older horses



Equine Cushing's Disease

- Tumor of the pituitary gland. The tumor does not metastasize and rarely causes problems locally- it secretes hormones that alter the normal metabolism in the horse
- Only seen in horses 8+ years of age



Equine Cushing's Disease - signs

- Long shaggy hair coat, does not shed out
- Laminitis
- Increased urination and drinking
- High blood glucose
- Laminitis
- Infertility
- Chronic infections



Equine Cushing's - Treatment

- Cyproheptadine or pergolide are drugs of choice
- These drugs change the hormone secretion from the tumors- they are not chemotherapy
- Positive response if signs improve
- Horse will need life long treatment



Older Horse- Summary

Dental care- examine mouth at least
2X/yr....

Feed highly digestible, good quality
forage and grain

May do better on pelleted feed designed for
the older horse

Hoof care to minimize lameness

Maintain routine exercise program

Up to date on vaccination and dewormers



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