



Waterlane
EQUINE VETS

FACTSHEETS

EQUINE CUSHING'S DISEASE

Equine Cushing's (Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction/PPID) is due to an overgrowth of cells in the pituitary gland (an endocrine organ located at the base of the brain) which leads to an overproduction of hormones (including ACTH) which affect various body functions. All breeds of horses and ponies are susceptible and the syndrome occurs more commonly in horses over the age of 10.



Signs of Equine Cushing's include excessively hairy and curly coat which fails to shed in summer, laminitis, muscle wasting/'pot-belly' appearance, weight loss, lethargy, recurrent infections, high worm burdens, dental disease and excessive drinking/urinating.

Diagnosis of Equine Cushing's is straight forward- a single blood test is taken in a calm environment to check ACTH hormone levels. The other option is a dexamethasone suppression test, however, this test is not recommended for horses/ ponies who are at risk of laminitis.

If your horse is diagnosed with Equine Cushing's, daily treatment with a drug called pergolide (Prascend®) will be recommended. This controls the over-production of hormones from the pituitary gland. Regular monitoring (initially monthly until the Cushing's is controlled) of your horses' ACTH levels are recommended to both determine your horses' response to treatment and, if possible, to reduce the amount of pergolide your horse receives. Most horses/ponies show a response within 6-8 weeks of starting treatment.

Other important points for managing a horse with Cushing's revolve around good senior horse health care - regular dental and farrier care, strategic de-worming and monitoring of faecal egg counts, as well as offering high-quality feed which is low in soluble carbohydrates will help ensure your horse/pony lives a long and healthy life.