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Lameness

Lameness is the number one reason for horses to need time off work and is the most common reason for horses to need veterinary attention.

Lameness is due to pain in a limb. Pain originating in the foot is the most common cause of lameness and lower limb lameness is more common than upper limb lameness. It is understandable that so many horses suffer from lameness as when exercised a huge amount of stress and strain is placed on the limbs. If you suspect your horse is lame it is best to seek veterinary advice early, as undiagnosed and untreated problems may become worse if left.

Initially this may be a telephone discussion or a visit to examine the horse at your premises. Sometimes however a more thorough lameness investigation will be needed.

Lameness investigations can be complicated and time consuming and ideally such examinations are

performed at the clinic where we have areas suitable for assessing the horse and have access to any diagnostic aids we need to carry out a thorough investigation.

Firstly we observe the horse standing and feel down the legs for any evidence of heat or swelling. Next we need to assess the lameness. Most commonly we assess lameness at the trot but severe lameness can sometimes be evident at the walk. When assessing lameness we will grade the lameness with a score out of 10 (0 being sound and 10 being non-weight bearing lame). A score of 1-3 is considered mild lameness, 4-6 is moderate and 7-10 being severe.

To determine which leg the horse is lame on we ask that the horse be trotted in a straight line on a hard even surface. Forelimb lameness is seen as the horse nods the head. The head drops down when the non-lame limb hits the floor. Hindlimb lameness is generally more difficult to diagnose and involves assessment of movement of the hind-quarters. The hind-quarters of the lame limb move more (this is easier to see as the horse trots away from you.) We may wish to see the horse lunged on a hard and a soft surface as circling can exacerbate the lameness and helps identify the limb (or limbs) affected. If the lameness is subtle and only seen when ridden we may wish to see the horse under saddle.

Once a lame limb is detected further palpation and manipulation of the leg will be done. Flexion tests may be performed in order to 'stress' the joints. If a horse is 'positive' to flexion then stress on the joints exacerbates the lameness indicating that the problem is more likely to involve joints. Hoof testers will be used on the foot to rule out anything such as pus in the foot.

Following identification of a lame limb nerve blocks will be performed to determine the region of the leg that is painful. This involves injecting local anaesthetic under the skin (similar to what the dentist uses in people). This local anaesthetic 'numbs' the area blocking any pain originating from that area. If the horse trots sound after the nerve block we know the pain originates from that area. We start at the bottom of the leg and progressively work upwards with the nerve blocks until the horse becomes sound.

Once the area causing the lameness is identified using nerve blocks further diagnostics can be used including radiographs and ultrasound examination. Following this a treatment plan can be devised according to the findings. If further investigation or referral is needed we have a digital x-ray machine that enables us to quickly email images to referral centres for further review or

to farriers if corrective shoeing is indicated.

Brown Moss Equine Clinic Haemo-Tonic Supplement

It is the time of year when we see horses that are feeling a little under the weather or are just showing signs of poor performance. This is usually as a result of having picked up a virus that is taking sometime to be eliminated by the immune system. If blood samples are taken from these horses it is often found that they are mildly anaemic (the red blood cell count is low) and also the white blood cells are low (these are the cells of the immune system).

We are now producing a supplement called **Haemo-Tonic** that is an iron enriched B vitamin syrup which is particularly useful in performance horses that are under performing and also in horses that are suffering from anaemia or a viral infection. If you have any further questions or feel your horse is under performing then please contact us on **01928 787500** and we will be happy to discuss it with you.