

Equine Cushings Disease - PPID

EQUINE MEDICINE & FIELD SERVICE

Equine Cushings Disease (PPID - Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction) is an endocrine disorder in horses caused by an imbalance of hormones in the body. In horses, the disease is caused by the degeneration of the nerve cells in the brain that release the hormone, dopamine. This degeneration is due to aging; this is different than the human or even canine form of the disease.

Dopamine is a hormone that is produced in a part of the brain called the hypothalamus. Dopamine sends messages to another part of the brain to release a hormone called ACTH. This hormone then travels to an organ in the abdomen called the adrenal gland, which releases cortisol. Excess cortisol in the body is mainly responsible for the clinical signs of Equine Cushings.

Your veterinarian can obtain a blood sample to test for Equine Cushings. While there are many tests available to check for and monitor the disease, none of them are perfect; therefore, it is important to continue monitoring clinical signs and blood tests after starting treatment.

The most common tests used to rule out Equine Cushings Disease are a baseline ACTH level in the blood or a dexamethasone suppression test. The dexamethasone suppression test involves your veterinarian collecting blood, then injecting a low dose of steroid, waiting 19-24 hours and returning to take another blood sample.

If your horse tests negative for the disease but is showing classic clinical signs, your veterinarian may recommend a TRH stimulation test with an ACTH measurement. This involves your veterinarian collecting blood, giving an injection of TRH and collecting another blood sample after 10 minutes. It is important to discuss the timing of these tests with your veterinarian because they should generally not be performed in the fall months.

Treatment for Equine Cushings Disease is accomplished by giving an oral tablet daily for the rest of your horse's life. The drug is called pergolide and works to increase the level of dopamine in the body. This drug is available in an FDA-approved formula known as Prascend®. There are also many generic, compounded formulations; however, there is no efficacy guarantee on these compounded products.



Clinical Signs:

- Long, curly haircoat (hypertrichosis)
- Abnormal or absent shedding of hair
- Excess urination and/or excess water intake
- Weight loss
- Muscle loss
- Regional Fat Deposits
- Immunosuppression
- Increase risk of laminitis in about 50% of cases

If your horse has these clinical signs contact your veterinarian.

Working together, you and your veterinarian can control the signs of Equine Cushings!