

# Equine Enucleation FAQs

## UTCVM OPHTHALMOLOGY

### Why would my horse benefit from an enucleation?

Enucleation is surgical removal of the eye where the eyelids are permanently closed.

There are several possible reasons to consider enucleation including:

- 1) a painful, blind eye,
- 2) long-term dependency on frequent medications to relieve pain,
- 3) infection that is worsening despite treatment and there is no option for a vision sparing surgery, or
- 4) cancer which is recurrent and/or invasive.

Enucleation surgery has a short post-operative period with minor, local discomfort, but oral anti-inflammatories will help control this pain. Horses that have experienced pain from uveitis, glaucoma, or corneal infection show signs of immediate relief and improvement in behavior after the surgery.

### What are the options for the surgery?

Enucleation is typically performed under standing sedation with local anesthesia. However, some horses may benefit from the procedure being performed under general anesthesia.

A silicone orbital implant may be placed in the eye socket to prevent a sunken appearance. The most common complication of an orbital implant is infection or rejection ( $\leq 10\%$ ), which can occur at any time and may require a second surgery to remove the implant. Some horses are not candidates for orbital implants and this option can be further discussed with your surgeon.

### What is the expected post-operative care?

A few oral medications will be prescribed for pain management and to try and prevent secondary infection.

**Bandage:** If a bandage is present over the wound post-operatively then discuss with your veterinarian when it needs to be changed or removed. Do not allow the bandage to get wet. To remove head bandages carefully cut the bandage off from underneath the chin. If the bandage becomes too loose it may be removed earlier.

**Incision site:** Once the bandage is removed monitor the incision daily for drainage. There may be a small amount of clear to bloody drainage for 4-5 days. If the drainage continues longer than 5 days or is yellow to green, please have your veterinarian examine your horse. Please monitor your horse's incision for any heat, pain, discharge, or dehiscence (sutures becoming too loose or falling out early). Keep the incision clean, dry and covered with a clean fly mask for 14 days.

There will be swelling of the incision and the orbit (eye socket) after surgery. This swelling will subside after 10-14 days. If it worsens, instead of improves, please call your veterinarian.

Turn out with a clean, dry fly mask is OK. If you would rather keep your horse on stall rest until the sutures are removed, then daily



*After enucleation the surgical site needs to stay clean and dry until the sutures are removed. Often a bandage is placed over the wound for a few days then the horse can transition to a removal protective covering such as this EquiVizor™ or a simple fly mask.*

hand walking/grazing is recommended. No forced exercise for 14 days.

Please have your veterinarian out in ~14 days for examination of the surgery site. Discuss with your surgeon prior to discharge if any non-absorbable suture will need to be removed at this time.

If your horse was visual prior to enucleation there will typically be a 2-3 week adjustment period of getting used to this new vision loss. If your horse was non-visual prior to the surgery, then the adjustment period will be minimal. Please be careful when handling your horse from the blind side.

Colic secondary to surgery can occur within the first 24-48 hours post-operatively. Monitor your horse for any changes in attitude, appetite or manure production and call your veterinarian with any concerns.

### Will there be any long-term consequences of the surgery?

Horses recover very well from enucleation surgery. There are minimal possible complications, and most horses require no further long-term care and experience no discomfort after surgery. If your horse has no orbital implant, frequent cleaning the skin of the orbit with a damp cloth will help keep your horse comfortable and prevent skin infections. If your horse does have an orbital implant, frequent monitoring of the site will help detect any complications (infection or rejection) early.

Many horses can continue their regular jobs with no adjustments, but some disciplines (e.g. polo) require two visual eyes to compete. Some horses may need to step down to a lower level within their discipline for safety concerns but can still perform. Use patience and caution when bringing your horse back to work.