



Station
House
Vets

Equine Cushing's Disease

Tel: 01653 618303

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What is Equine Cushing's Disease

Equine cushing's disease (*PPID – Pituitary Pars Intermediary Dysfunction*) is a hormonal disease caused by changes in the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain.

This gland is normally controlled by a substance called dopamine and its role is to produce a variety of hormones which play an important role in maintaining and controlling a variety of bodily functions. Horses and ponies with Cushing's don't produce enough dopamine which means that the pituitary gland becomes uncontrolled and produces too many hormones. Rarely compression of adjacent parts of the brain can result in blindness & seizures.

What are the clinical signs of Cushing's?

Clinical signs include:

- increased coat length
- delayed shedding of the winter coat
- **laminitis**
- lethargy
- increased sweating
- weight loss
- excessive drinking
- excessive urinating
- loss of muscle tone



What age of horses are affected by Cushing's?

Cushing's primarily affects horses over the age of 10, with 19 being the average age of diagnosis. It can be quite prevalent in aged equine populations – 1 in 5 horses over 15 years old will have Cushing's disease. Ponies are more likely to be affected than horses with native breeds being most often affected.



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How is Cushing's diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on history, clinical signs, and specific hormone tests.

The simplest and most common test for Equine Cushing's disease is the basal ACTH test. To perform this test your vet will take a blood sample from your horse and send it to a laboratory that will measure the levels of a hormone called ACTH. The results of the test will then be compared to reference ranges (which will change with the seasons) to confirm the presence or absence of Equine Cushing's disease.

We are part of a programme through Caring About Cushing's who provide a nationwide FREE diagnostic and monitoring test scheme for Equine Cushing's disease throughout September & October and March & April each year. If eligible you may be able to get a voucher for an annual free diagnostic and monitoring blood test. Ask the team for more details.

You can also visit www.careaboutcushings.co.uk

What is the treatment and management regime for Cushing's?

If your pony shows a positive result then we would recommend starting with a low dose of daily Prascend, a tiny but bitter tasting tablet which luckily fits into a polo hole.

After 4-6 weeks we will retest to ensure that the medicine is controlling the excess hormone production. This retest can now also be claimed FREE if you treat with Prascend. Thereafter we monitor the response to treatment and perform routine blood tests once or twice annually.

If you decide not to treat with Prascend or other appropriate veterinary medication immediately, you will remain eligible for the free annual diagnostic test from the following year.

Find out more at www.stationhousevets.co.uk