

Ask the Vet

Got a burning question about equine health? Dr. Lydia Gray is here to help.

Dr. Lydia Gray is the Medical Director and Staff Veterinarian for SmartPak Equine in Plymouth, MA, where she directs the research and development of products and provides horse health and nutrition education to a wide variety of audiences. Dr. Gray's work has appeared in more than a dozen general and trade publications and she speaks frequently around the country. She is the proud owner of a Trakehner gelding named "Newman" that she competes in dressage and combined driving, is president of her local driving club in Illinois and just graduated with distinction from the USDF "L" judges program. Heavily involved in organized veterinary medicine, she is a past president of the Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association and has served on numerous committees for both the AAEP and the AVMA. For emergencies, you call your own vet, but what if you have a general health question or want an explanation on an equine medical mystery? Submit your questions here, and Lydia Gray, DVM will answer selected submissions. Send your questions to horseillustrated@egmediamags.com and use subject line "Ask the Vet."

Latest Question

Ask the Vet: Rehabbing a Retired Racehorse

I'm wanting to adopt an off-track Thoroughbred (OTTB) and help him through the last stages of rehabilitation from minor racing injuries. What are the best questions to ask the vet that has already worked with the horse in order to establish a good understanding of the current condition, as well as steps moving forward? [Past Questions](#)

Ask the Vet: Do stallions have more teeth than mares?

Can you settle a bet? I was always told that male horses (stallions and geldings) have more teeth than mares, but my friend says that's not true. Can you set us straight on horse teeth, how many they have, when, and why?

Ask the Vet: EOTRH

The vet was just out to look at my 20-year-old horse, who's become difficult to bridle, picks at his food, and won't even take carrots from my hand anymore. I kinda figured it was a mouth problem, but my vet said regular floating wouldn't fix this, that my horse has some kind of new disease (with a bunch of letters) that might mean some teeth have to get pulled. Do you have any idea what she was talking about?

Ask the Vet: Colic Surgery Aftercare

My horse just had colic surgery and will be coming home in a few days. I'm sure the hospital (and my regular vet) will give me advice on how to care for him, but this is the first time I (and he!) have been through this and I want to make sure I'm doing everything right. What is your advice?

Ask the Vet: Evaluating Colic

How do I know if my horse's colic is a simple one that can be managed here on the farm or if he needs to be taken to a hospital for surgery? I've heard that the sooner horses get to surgery the better, so I don't want to wait too long.

Ask the Vet: When to Geld a Colt

What is the best age to geld a stallion? is it better to do it before starting them under saddle?

Ask the Vet: Locked Stifle

I have a young horse that had a locked stifle. It happened twice so far, once when she was 2 years old and the second time was about a year after that. Why does it happen? Is there a treatment for it? And is it a long term problem?

Ask the Vet: Fruits and Veggies for Horses

I love giving my horse special treats, so I was wondering what kind of fruits and vegetables are safe to feed your horse?

Ask the Vet: Time to Retire

What are some signs that your horse needs to retire? What type of life style can you create for a retired horse if you don't have grass pastures?

Ask the Vet: Sugary Horse Treats

As you may know there are these treats with sugary foods on them that have been in high demand lately. These treats have things on them like cereal, jelly beans, sprinkles, and etc. Are these treats are actually healthy for horses? If people do buy them, should there be a limit? Also, should there be things to look out for (like red flags) if people do buy them? Lastly, what are some treat alternatives?

Ask the Vet: Hoof Oil and Hoof Hardener

What is the difference between hoof hardener and hoof oil? Depending on what climate you live in and what season it is (dry or humid; spring, summer, fall, winter, etc) when should I use hoof hardener and/or oil? Is it possible to use too much hoof hardener and/or oil? Where is the most beneficial place to apply hoof hardener and/or hoof oil?

Ask the Vet: Hot Weather Exercises for Horses

What exercises could I do with my horse when it's too hot for intense riding? Longeing? Poles?

Ask the Vet: Too Hot to Ride

How do you tell when it's too hot to ride your horse?

Ask the Vet: Sensitive Ears

What do you do when your horse constantly shakes and has sensitive ears, but there is no sign of mites?

Ask the Vet: Packing Hooves

What are the pros and cons of packing your horse's feet and what do you recommend packing them with?

Ask the Vet: Pre-Purchase Exam

Could you review the components of a typical pre-purchase exam? Which parts do you see as vital for any buyer? Which parts might you consider optional?

Ask the Vet: Your Horse's Teeth

How can you tell the age of a horse by the teeth? And what are the most common teeth/gum/jaw diseases that horses can get?

Ask the Vet: The Risk of Moon Blindness

I have an Appaloosa/Paint mix, and my farrier once mentioned to me to be careful about moon blindness. What is it, what breeds does it affect, what can be done to prevent it, and once it's contracted, what are the treatment options? Since my horse is a mix, is he less likely to contract moon blindness?

Ask the Vet: Anhidrosis

I have a horse that was diagnosed with Anhidrosis. Aside from medication, is there anything I can do to help him? I once saw a horse like that at a barn I was at before, and since medication wouldn't help him much, the owner decided to start giving him half a beer every morning to help him sweat. Apparently it worked, but is that a good idea?

Ask the Vet: Farrier Assessment

How can you tell if your farrier is doing a good job?

Ask the Vet: Clipping a Horse's Whiskers

With show season coming up, is it truly harmful to shave/trim a horse's facial whiskers since they are "connected" to their brain cells?

Ask the Vet: Impaction Colic

My horse recently colicked with an impaction in her small intestine. For several days before the colic, she was sensitive in grooming on her upper left loin. Is it possible for an impaction to build up over a period of time?

Ask the Vet: Chronic Choking

I have an older horse in his 20s and he has recently started choking. He is now considered a chronic choker. I have had to get him tubed twice by the vet and now we have to soak his food in half a bucket of water. We think it is due to him just getting to excited about his food. My vet recommended soaking his food or taking him off grain (grain is the only thing he chokes on). Do you have any other ways of dealing with it? And can you explain why it is easier for a horse to choke after they have done it once already?

Ask the Vet: Ringbone

I recently discovered that my horse has ringbone. He is on a joint supplement for now but what else can you do to treat and prevent ringbone? What exactly is it and how long until I will see the side effects? I am in close contact with my vet as well. My horse is a 4-year-old OTTB gelding.

Ask the Vet: Mud and Horse Health

With this time of year comes lots of mud and generally wet weather. What is the best way to prevent thrush, scratches and other diseases that come with spring?

Ask the Vet: Horse Health for Long Distance Trailering

My dad is going to retire from the military probably in March next year, and for us that means we have to haul my horse from North Carolina to Texas where we plan to keep him at my grandparents' house. Are there any vaccinations and tests I need to have for him before we go, and what do I need to look out for health-wise once we get there? We've always done cross-country moves before but never with a horse.

Ask the Vet: Feeding Beet Pulp to Horses

During the winter, it is hard to find hay for sale in my area so I feed my 12-year-old mare beet pulp. I have read that beet pulp lacks in nutrition and vitamins. Is there a better alternative for beet pulp or some sort of supplement I could be feeding her in addition to beet pulp?

Ask the Vet: Hot or Cold?

What is the difference between hot and cold therapy and under what circumstances should each be used?

Ask the Vet: Winter Hydration

How can I ensure my horse stays hydrated through the colder months?

Ask the Vet: Cannon Bone Crud

What is the fungus horses get on the front of their cannon bones on their back legs and how can I get rid of it?

Ask the Vet: Bot Egg Removal

What's the best way to control bots and remove bot eggs from your horse?

Ask the Vet: Warts in Horses

I was wondering about warts in horses. A horse I am looking after for a friend has a white wart in his ear but I also know they can get them on their face. How can warts be treated, prevented, and kept from being passed on from horse to horse?

Ask the Vet: Adjusting to Pasture

I just recently purchased a 15-year-old gelding. He has only been on hay feed, not grass pasture. We've had him for almost a week now and have slowly been putting him in the grass pasture. What would be the appropriate time and for how long before he can go 24/7 on pasture?

Ask the Vet: Fall Vaccinations for Horses

Why do we give shots in spring? Can I have my vet give them in the fall instead?

Ask the Vet: Allergy Symptoms in Horses

I have an 11-year-old Saddlebred gelding. He is a roarer and had a failed tie back surgery years ago. I try to keep his feed moist and am conscious of his breathing. He is starting to have allergy symptoms like runny nose, coughing, eye discharge. Do I need to start him on a supplement? He seems fine otherwise.

Ask the Vet: Summer Sores

We have had a few pasture horses develop "summer sores" on their lower lips, and I've heard it is caused by a fly-borne parasite. They were already wormed with Ivermectin about a month ago, which seems to be the most common treatment suggestion I can find. Can a horse develop summer sores even after deworming, or could this be something else? What is the best method of treatment?

Ask the Vet: Roaring in Horses

Can you explain partial vocal cord paralysis? Is a horse still rideable with it?

Ask the Vet: Vitamin E for Horses

My vet recently told me that my horse should be on a Vitamin E supplement since he has no access to pasture. I went online to research my options but now I'm SO confused! There seem to be a lot of different forms of vitamin E, how do I know which one is best? Some forms claim higher bioavailability than others, but what does that even mean?

Ask the Vet: Storing Equine Medications

Can I keep pain medications like Bute and Banamine in my tack room or will they go bad? It's not heated or air conditioned, but it's insulated and we keep it closed up so it doesn't get quite as hot or cold as the rest of the barn.

Ask the Vet: Kissing Spine

I would like more information on overriding dorsal spinous processes - kissing spine. I especially would like to know how this disease can affect a senior horse and about treatment and medication.

Ask the Vet: Walking a Colicking Horse

I understand walking a colicking horse into exhaustion until the vet gets there is not beneficial at all, but what if a horse desperately wants to roll?

Ask the Vet: Funky Ear Plaque

My horse has a funky white plaque inside his ears. Everything I've read says to leave it alone, and it doesn't seem to bother him, but it bothers me! Is there any safe treatment for it? Could it potentially cause problems if I don't treat it?

Ask the Vet: Colic Risk Factors

I'm doing a group project at school about colic, trying to find a solution that we could give horses to help stop it. We would greatly appreciate if you could give us some advice on colic and some things used to help it before it gets to the advanced stage.

Ask the Vet: Helping a Horse Gain Weight

My mare is a hard keeper. How can I maintain her weight easily?

Ask the Vet: Symptoms of Ulcers

I recently bought a Thoroughbred mare that is seriously underweight. I'm worried that she might have ulcers. I've had her for a few weeks on grain and 24/7 hay and she doesn't seem to be gaining any weight. How can you tell if she has ulcers?

Ask the Vet: A Strongyle Infestation

Are there regional sub-species of strongyles? I had a mare come in from Texas to Maryland on Sept 22 who received a Panacur Power Pac 5 days before shipping whose fecal sample came back high for strongyles on Dec 8. She has subsequently been dewormed with Zimecterin Gold on Dec 16. What should be my next course of action and what timeframe?

Ask the Vet: Sore Hooves after a Trim

I have a 12-year-old Appaloosa whose feet have been very tender for 5 to 7 days after a trim. This is the first year we kept him barefoot all summer. I was told that it could be due to retracted soles. Is there anything I can do for him after a trim to reduce the tenderness?

Ask the Vet: Moving Horses for the Winter

As I get older, I enjoy cold winters less and less. I am considering taking part-time residence in a warmer climate during the winter months. I would love to take my horses with me. Would it stress their health in any way to change climates twice a year—warm and humid in spring and summer, dry and mild in fall and winter?

Ask the Vet: Coughing During Warm-up

Lately my gelding has started coughing when I first take him out of his stall and start warming up. He is kept in his stall about 12 hours every day. The barn he stays in is very open and has excellent ventilation. Is it possible that his hay is too dusty or is there something else that could be causing this?

Ask the Vet: A Horse's Sleepy Behavior

My Quarter horse mare has developed a strange behavior. Suddenly she will act drowsy, eyes half closed, head slightly down. Then she rocks back and forth like she's trying to keep her balance. Sometimes she'll go down on her legs, like a horse would when about to lie down; then she'll stand up again. The first time was really bad. We called a vet, but by the time he got there she was acting fine. He looked her over and found nothing wrong. She's done it two times since. Within about 20 minutes, she's just fine. What could be wrong with my girl?

Read More Ask the Vet Questions

Ask the Vet: Cushing's Disease and Cracked Hooves

I have 24-year-old gelding who is arthritic and has Cushing's disease. His hooves have begun to chip and crack a lot more this past month despite him having access to a mineral and salt block, high quality grass and hay, and grain. All of the other horses who live with him have perfectly fine hooves that are strong and healthy with no cracks or chips. What could be causing this?

Ask the Vet: Cooling Out Your Horse

I know I'm supposed to cool my horse down completely after every ride. What's the best way to determine if she's properly cooled off?

Ask the Vet: Rest Stops on Long Trailer Rides

How often do you need to stop and offer your horse water during a long-distance trailer ride? And how often should horses be allowed off the trailer to stretch their legs?

Ask the Vet: Dental Care and Bitless Bridles

I've always heard that floating is necessary because unfloated teeth can interfere with the bit. I only ride my horse in a bitless bridle. Does that mean he doesn't need as much dental work done as other horses do?

Ask the Vet: My Horse Drops Grain When He Eats

I have an older horse who drops a lot of grain when he eats. However, he doesn't seem to have any trouble with hay or grass. Is he just messy? Is there something else that would cause him to drop grain but not forage?

Ask the Vet: Wolf Teeth

Why do horses have their wolf teeth removed?

Ask the Vet: Dressage Training for an Arthritic Horse

I've been doing dressage with my horse for the past four years. She is now 19 and while she is generally sound and healthy, I'm starting to notice some symptoms of arthritis. I wondered aloud the other day if I should consider backing off and maintain our current level instead of trying to progress further. My trainer said no, that if I'm riding her correctly, dressage will only help keep her joints and muscles strong as she ages. I know that light work is good for arthritis, but is that true for active dressage training? How much work is too much?

Ask the Vet: Nutrition Changes for Horse Show Season

My horse and I have a pretty low-key workout routine in the winter. I start working on building his fitness back up in the spring, and by summer we're training five to six days each week and competing pretty regularly. We wind down late in the fall and then the cycle starts again. I don't change his feed much seasonally, and I'm wondering if I should. Should I up his grain or add supplemental nutrition when we're in the height of riding season?

Ask the Vet: Vaccinations for Newborn Foals

I always thought that foals had to have shots pretty early on, just like human babies. My friend says they don't need vaccinations because they get antibodies from their mother when they begin nursing. Who's right?

Ask the Vet: Condition Scoring for Yearlings

I recently adopted a yearling that I am keeping at home with my retired horses until he's old enough to begin training. He has a clean bill of health from my vet, but he's visibly ribby and I'm worried that he's underweight. Can the body condition scoring system be used for yearlings? Is it normal for youngsters to appear somewhat skinny?

Ask the Vet: Deworming and Ulcers

Have you ever heard of dewormer causing or aggravating ulcers? We have a Percheron that came from Canada originally that we believe has ulcers. We're told she was dewormed just before she left. I know stress is a major factor with ulcers, and the 24-hour trailer ride from Canada was likely stressful, but I just want to make sure deworming wouldn't be a problem before we start her on a parasite control program.

Ask the Vet: Vaccinations for At-Home Horses

All of my horses are now retired from competing and I keep them at home where there aren't other horses coming in and out of the barn. Do I need to continue to vaccinate them on the same schedule they had when they were competing, or can I scale it back now that they aren't coming into contact with other horses?

Ask the Vet: DIY Vaccinations

I own two off-track Thoroughbreds that live at home. I have been considering self-vaccination for my mare and gelding. Can you share with me pros and cons of not having my veterinarian do this task?

Ask the Vet: Recurrent Colic

My horse recently had a bout of colic. He recovered fully, but I've been told that once a horse colics, he's more likely to colic again. Is that true? And if so, why?

Ask the Vet: The Colic/Ulcer Connection

My horse has recently been diagnosed with ulcers, and I am treating him with probiotics, however, is there a connection between ulcers and colic? Do horses with ulcers have higher instances of colic episodes?

Ask the Vet: The First Signs of Lameness

What's the correct course of action if my horse suddenly comes up lame with no apparent injury? Do I always need to call the vet, or are there cases where it's okay to wait and see? And what should I do to keep my horse comfortable in the meantime?

Ask the Vet: Horse Eye Injuries

There are a lot of horror stories out there about horse eye injuries. So my question is, what should I do if my horse has an eye injury but the vet can't come out immediately? How do I protect the eye while I wait for the vet?

Ask the Vet: Blankets and Shelter for Horses in Winter

I have two new horses this winter on 24/7 turnout. One is an athletic build and has the start of a nice fluffy coat. The other is more classic stock horse and if anything is a little on the heavy side, but has put on very little noticeable coat. I live in the upper Midwest and it gets very cold here. As the winter goes on, how do I evaluate these horses for their potential to need a blanket or to spend more time in the barn?

Ask the Vet: Monitoring a Horse's Weight in Winter

I have an 18-year-old off-track Thoroughbred who lives on pasture. His weight is normally pretty steady, but as he ages, I worry about him dropping weight. The problem is, he grows a super thick winter coat, and I have trouble assessing his weight. What can I do to keep track of his weight when it's difficult to see—or even feel—his body condition under all that hair?

Ask the Vet: Senior Horse in a Herd

I keep my 30-year-old pony at a boarding stable where she's turned out in a fairly large field with four other horses. Most of the time they seem to peacefully coexist, but when push comes to shove, my pony is at the bottom of the pecking order. I worry that the physical and mental stress of being chased will take a toll. Is there anything I can do to help her?

How can horse owners be proactive to reduce the risk of future joint problems?

My horse seems to have normal, healthy joints, but I know joint health becomes an issue for many horses as they get older. So my question is, how do I prevent joint degeneration in the first place?

Does My Horse Need Hock Injections?

I've had my 10-year-old Quarter horse gelding for almost two years. A few months before I bought him, his previous owner gave him hock injections. He's still a bit stiff in his back right hock. I don't want to jump right into x-rays and hock injections, so I was wondering if there was anything else I could do to help him?

Forage for Senior Horses

I know senior feeds contain a forage replacer for horses with difficulty chewing and digesting hay, but it doesn't seem enough. What other forage options are there for the hard to keep senior horse?

Help for a Horse with Sweet Itch

My 8-year-old gelding has a bad case of sweet itch. When I bought him three years ago, I was told he liked to scratch his stomach, but I eventually figured out that he's very allergic to the bite of midges. I've been buying fly blankets, neck covers, masks and the most powerful fly sprays available. He still itches. What else can I do?

How can I protect my horse's eyes from flies?

Is there a safe way to keep flies away from my horse's eyes? He always manages to take off his fly mask, but it doesn't seem safe to use fly spray near his eyes. Are there any other options?

Read Dr. Gray's answer here >>

Is it bad to rotate my horse between barefoot and shod?

In the winter I usually pull the shoes off my horse and then come spring I put fronts on and then move back to shoes all the way around when summer approaches. I've heard this can be a bad thing. Is it really? And if it is, why?

My horse recently recovered from laminitis. How do I prevent it from happening again?

I have a 22 year old quarter horse that recently experienced his first bout of laminitis. What are some key diet points to consider as he recovers from this episode and prevent relapses?

My horse lives at a boarding barn. How can I update my deworming routine?

I don't feel comfortable asking the other boarders to spend money on a fecal count. Any advice on making the switch from rotational dewormers to the fecal count method?

How do I find out if my horse has tapeworms, and what do I do about it if he does?

I've been told that fecal testing will not indicate if my horse is infested with tapeworms. So how can I find out if he has them? And if he does, how do I treat them?

Is it safe to work my horse on hills?

My Quarter Horse mare has done most of her training in arenas and flat areas. I've heard that hill work can be helpful for improving a horse's condition, but I don't want to cause an injury. Is it safe to ride her on hills? Are the benefits worth the risks?

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Does a horse get sufficient exercise from running and playing in the pasture?

My horse lives in a big pasture and runs around a lot with his friends in the winter. Does that mean he's getting plenty of exercise, or should his spring conditioning routine still start as if he's had no exercise at all?

What kind of exercise is best for managing my horse's weight?

I have a 15-year-old mare who is a very easy keeper. I manage her diet pretty carefully, but I'm wondering how much of

a role exercise can play in managing her weight. I usually ride four days a week for about an hour at low to moderate intensity. Is that enough to make a difference? If I need to add more exercise, is it better to ride her more often at the same level I work her now, or increase the intensity of our rides?

Could my horse's restricted diet cause a vitamin deficiency?

My horse is a very easy keeper. He wears a grazing muzzle in the spring and summer which seems to keep him from getting too fat, but is he getting all the nutrition he needs? Is there any chance he could have a vitamin or mineral deficiency when all he eats is limited pasture?

Filling out in the Hip

My 8-year-old Quarter Horse is on high-quality grain and a regular deworming program, but he's just not filling out in the hip area. He's at a good weight otherwise, possibly even a bit overweight. He's started regular training and is about to be broke to saddle. Is there anything I can do to get him to fill out?

Ulcers and the Hard Keeper

I have a 15-year-old gelding that I acquired last year. When I first brought him home he was very underweight. Someone told me that it may be stomach ulcers and try to cure them first and he will put weight on. Is that a possibility? Is there anything else that could be preventing him from gaining weight?

Exercising Horses in Cold Weather

It has been 20 degrees Fahrenheit or colder here for weeks. Is it safe to work my horse in these temperatures, or is it bad for his lungs? Should I scale back or stop riding completely?

Leaving the Barn Open in Winter My friend told me that it's better to keep the windows open in the barn so fresh air circulates, even in the winter. Is that still true in the middle of a polar vortex? I hate to leave the barn open when the windchill is -40!