



DODSON & HORRELL

ANIMAL HEALTH, NUTRITION AND WELL-BEING

FEEDING SUCCESS

CHOKES

All you need to know

What is Choke?

- Choke occurs when food becomes lodged in your horse's oesophagus. It can be very distressing for both you and your horse.
- Your horse will try to clear the obstruction, which usually involves retching, coughing and production of large amounts of saliva. This saliva cannot pass around the obstruction which causes a build-up, leading to drooling and nasal discharge, possibly containing food material. Horses are often restless and stand with their neck extended towards the ground. They may also sweat and tremble.
- Fortunately, the majority of chokes will clear on their own, usually around ten minutes after the choke started. However, some obstructions can be difficult to clear and require intensive veterinary treatment. There is possibility of overflowing saliva and food material passing into the lungs so you should contact your vet immediately if your horse chokes. Treatment involves drugs to relax the oesophagus and anti-inflammatories. If this does not work your vet may pass a tube down the oesophagus and flush out the obstructing material.

What causes choke?

- Choke can be caused by primary or secondary impactions of food material.
- Primary impactions occur when there are no abnormalities of the oesophagus or surrounding structures. This is often due to bolting food, particularly when horses are dehydrated or tired following exercise. Horses with dental problems, who struggle to chew food properly, could also be at increased risk of developing choke.
- Secondary Impactions occur when abnormalities of the oesophagus or surrounding structures prevent food from passing into the stomach. These abnormalities could be tumours or strictures in the wall of the oesophagus, foreign bodies that have been swallowed or masses such as tumours or abscesses in the neck or chest. Some horses could have congenital defects in their oesophagus that lead to choke.



Call us now for free expert nutritional advice: **01832 737300**

FEEDING AND MANAGING TO AVOID CHOKE

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1. Reintroduce forage slowly after an episode:

- Once your horse has had choke it is important to adjust their feeding programme to minimise risk of a repeat episode. To start with you should feed only sloppy mashes of sugar beet pulp or soaked fibre nuts. This should be fed little and often to support hindgut function during recovery. grazing during the recovery period is important, although any long swards or fibrous grasses should be avoided. Hay or haylage should be reintroduced slowly following an episode and hay should be soaked. You should avoid compressed hay 'bricks' as these can increase the risk of choke.

2. Regular dental check-ups:

- Choke is often caused by failure to chew food properly. Missing cheek teeth or overgrowths such as hooks or ramps could prevent your horse chewing effectively, or sharp points on teeth could cause pain leading to reduced chewing.

3. Prevent bolting of feed:

- Horses who eat very quickly could be at more risk of developing choke. Placing a salt rock or large rock in their feed bowl can slow down the intake of feed. You should ensure that rocks are too big to eat and have no shard edges. Adding a chaff to concentrate feed will encourage chewing, slow down eating and prevent the formation of large clumps of concentrate in the oesophagus. It can also help to split feed into several small meals per day, and to feed with

a bridle on. When horses are fed together in the same paddock some may bolt their feed due to peer pressure from others. Ideally all horses should be fed separately.

4. Avoid feeding immediately after exercise:

- After exercise horses may be dehydrated or tired and will not be producing saliva, as it is only produced whilst chewing. This means that the first few mouthfuls are swallowed with less lubrication than usual which could lead to choke. It is important to allow your horse to recover and rehydrate before feeding concentrates or hay.

5. Feed Concentrates Wet:

- Adding a cup of warm water can moisten concentrate feeds and help to prevent choke. If your horse has had choke in the past we would recommend making your horse's feed into a thick soup or porridge consistency. Adding soaked sugar beet pulp can make an appetising mash plus it provides essential fibre and protein.

6. Feed a Forage Replacer:

- Horses who have recently had choke or have abnormalities that could lead to secondary impactions could choke on hay or even grass. These horses could benefit from a forage replacer, fed damp to minimise the risk of choke. This can be made by mixing 600g each of alfalfa, fibre cubes and soaked sugar beet.

We are here to help!

Choke can be distressing for both you and your horse but with the correct feeding and management the majority of cases are preventable. Our team of Nutritional Advisors is on-hand to offer free, friendly and practical feeding advice that can really make a difference to your horse or pony's life.

Please visit our website, get in touch via social media or call: **01832 737300**

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