

# HAYES EQUINE VETERINARY SERVICES

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## May 2018 Newsletter

### All Choked Up

For some reason, this month has seen a slew of choked horses. It never fails that right around feeding time, we get the call that the horse seems really depressed, won't eat his food, and has stuff pouring out his nose when his head is down. From the young to the old, any horse can choke, but there are a few key things you can do to prevent this.

The first thing to remember is that your horse needs regular dental work. If he is experiencing any kind of dental pain, or if his teeth don't meet up correctly, this can cause him to not chew his food well before swallowing. Older horses that don't have many teeth left find it difficult to chew food at all, therefore they try to swallow the food too soon. For older horses, or horses prone to choking, wetting their food to the consistency somewhere between oatmeal and soup can really help them swallow without even needing to chew. Older horses with little to no teeth left may even have to be switched from hay or pasture to chopped forage or soaked pellets to avoid choking on the bigger pieces. And remember, just because your horse is old and doesn't have many teeth left, that doesn't mean they don't need care.

Some horses tend to dive into their food with gusto, especially those first few bites. They're so hungry and excited about their grain that they grab a huge mouthful and swallow too fast. These horses can benefit from being fed smaller meals more often. Feeding them in a big tub can also be helpful so they can't get a huge mouthful at one time. Schedules are good for these horses as well, since it can prevent the horse from getting too hungry. Some people have found that adding something to the feed bucket the horse has to eat around, like a large rock, can be helpful. Just make sure if you use this method that the rock is too big to get in their mouth.

There are two common foodstuffs that horses choke on besides grain that are more difficult to remove. The first being beet pulp and the second being hay cubes. Beet pulp is especially difficult because as it gets wet, it expands and gets sticky. Removing a beet pulp choke takes a long time. Where a normal grain choke might take 20-30 minutes to remove, a beet pulp choke can take upwards of an hour and a half to two hours. Hay cubes are difficult because you have to hydrate the outside of a hay cube a layer at a time to get it small enough to pass.

As a rule of thumb, a horse gets 20 minutes to unchoke themselves. If they are unable to do so in 20 minutes, veterinary prevention may be needed. Your veterinarian will sedate the horse, give him

some muscle relaxers, and insert a tube down the throat to the level of the obstruction. From there, depending on what is stuck, they will try to flush out the obstruction. Afterwards, your horse will be put on anti-inflammatories and antibiotics, as pneumonia is always a concern with choke from breathing in the saliva or food that comes back out the throat. Since the throat is often sore after choking, wetting the food to a consistency of soup is often warranted. Sometimes using a camera to look in the throat can tell how damaged the throat is, what is stuck, or if there may be any complications afterwards.

If you ever see food or liquid coming out the horse's nose, it's important to think of choke, and to alert your veterinarian that their assistance may be needed. As always, if there is ever a question or a concern, feel free to call your veterinarian.

**Castration Signs: May 2<sup>nd</sup> thru May 10<sup>th</sup> 2018**