

EQUINE CUSHINGS DISEASE (PARS PITUITARY INTERMEDIA DYSFUNCTION)

What is Equine Cushing's Disease?

Cushing's disease is a combination of clinical signs such as long thick hair coat (hirsutism), laminitis, increased water intake and urinating large volumes. The underlying cause is often a mass (benign tumor) in the pituitary gland, and is typically seen in middle aged horses. It appears to be more prevalent in ponies.

What are the clinical signs?

- Long and thick hair coat which can also be unusually curly
- Abnormal hair coat shedding (shed late spring, winter coat comes in early fall)
- Chronic laminitis
- Lethargy
- Weight Loss
- Increased water intake and producing large volumes of urine.
- Higher incidence of infections (skin, sinus, dental, etc.)

How do we diagnose Equine Cushing's Disease?

- Usually based on history, clinical signs and laboratory test
- Measuring plasma cortisol levels over a 24 hour period in conjunction with steroid administration.
- Measuring ACTH (Adrenocorticotrophic hormone) in horses/ponies who are prone to laminitis and would be put at further risk for founder with the steroid administration required for the 24 hour cortisol measurement.

How do we treat / manage Equine Cushings's Disease?

- The most commonly used drug is Pergolide (dopamine agonist).
- Pergolide is administered orally and helps to regulate the pituitary gland. This leads to improvement in clinical signs, i.e. hair coat, lethargy, water consumption and urination.
- There are other options that can be used in conjunction with Pergolide.
- Encourage exercise, if laminitis isn't a limiting factor
- Feed a low Carbohydrate diet