

Fact Sheet

Eye Disease & Injuries

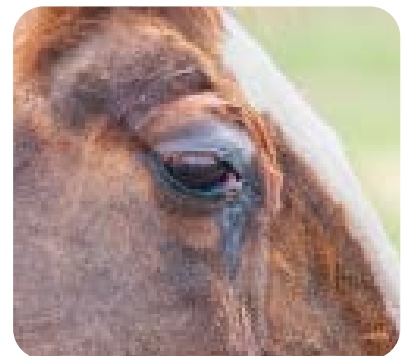
The horse's eye

The horse's eye is a vulnerable and sensitive structure and its prominence in the head predisposes it to a variety of diseases.

Eye injuries and diseases in the horse are common and if inappropriately treated can result in permanent damage to eye resulting in loss of vision or even loss of the eye.

What are the typical signs of eye problems?

- Closed eye/blinking a lot
- Watery eyes
- Discharge
- Cloudiness
- Sensitivity to light
- Swelling and or redness
- Spooking (especially in poor light)
- Behavioural changes



How to diagnose an injured or diseased eye

The outlook for the future sight and comfort of the sore eye depends on the right treatment being instigated for the particular condition. Therefore, an ocular examination by your vet is clearly necessary to achieve the correct diagnosis before prescribing treatments. Some treatments may help one condition, whilst causing another to deteriorate.

Access to a darkened stable is recommended for a complete examination.

Vets often put a coloured dye ('Fluorescein') into the horse's eye to help detect any ulcers (pictured), or damage to the surface of the cornea.

One of the main difficulties in diagnosing the wide variety of problems seen in the horses' eye is the pain, which prevents a proper examination without the aid of drugs.

Pain represents itself in a very similar fashion despite the range of different conditions – swollen eyelids, squinting, crying and light sensitivity are regularly seen.

The use of sedation and nerve blocks around the eye may facilitate the correct diagnosis to be made, offering pain relief and safety for your horse during examination.

It is our aim as vets to achieve, as rapidly as possible, a pain-free and fully sighted eye. Starting the correct treatment as quickly as possible is paramount and an early examination of any 'sore eye' is strongly advised – never just assume that a swollen eye is due to flies!



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Common eye problems

The majority of cases is due to conjunctivitis. However, in a number of horses it may be due to uveitis (inflammation of the uvea) & corneal ulcers.

Uveitis means inflammation of the uveal tract. It can occur as a primary disease or secondary to other conditions affecting the eye such as trauma or corneal ulcers.

Some horses will develop equine recurrent uveitis (also known as moon blindness). The severity of the condition and the interval between episodes varies with each individual.

If not treated promptly and aggressively uveitis can lead to long term complications such as adhesions between the iris and cornea and in very severe cases, blindness.

Treatment is provided to reduce pain and inflammation within the eye and to dilate the pupil in order to provide pain relief and to prevent adhesions.

Corneal ulcers are common and usually caused by trauma, flies or foreign bodies such as grass seeds. Such irritation can result in a break of the thin outer membrane of the cornea, allowing bacteria to enter and cause further damage. The vet will usually check by using a fluorescent dye to stain the surface, this should make any irregularities more visible. They should be treated immediately as they can become severely infected.

Treatment is usually antibiotic eye drops to help control the infection. Plasma (fluid from the horse's blood) can also be used, to help speed the ulcer healing. Anti-inflammatory medication can also be administered to make the horse more comfortable.

Treatment

Many eye problems can be treated by topical eye ointments, which will need to be administered several times daily, as prescribed by your vet.

Serious infections, ulcers or eye trauma may require a number of medications to be administered at frequent intervals and for these cases it may be recommended that your horse is hospitalised for treatment.



How to prevent eye problems?

- It is good practice to check your horse's eyes daily so you can spot any problems
- Using fly masks, preferably with UV protection
- Ensuring there are no protruding objects in your horse's field or stable

Getting your horse used to having the area around their eyes handled will help if any treatment is ever needed.



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