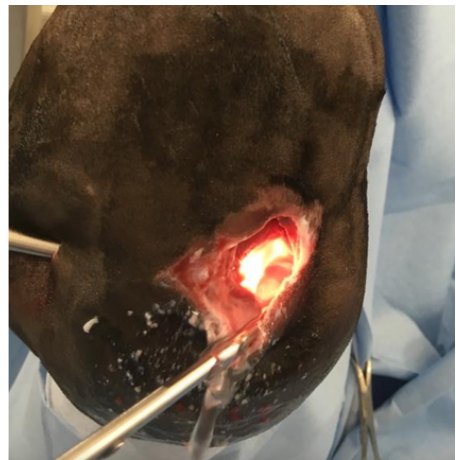


Joint infections and why understanding the basic anatomy of your horse is important

We all know how important it is to understand our own horse and what is 'normal' for them. This is one of the many reasons we are able to detect small things quickly, such as an unusual swelling, heat in a leg or a lameness. When it comes to problems such as joint infections it is also important to understand the basic anatomy of a horse so that we can pinpoint exactly where a joint is, which then allows us to make a more informed decision as to whether a wound is potentially an issue or not.

Joint infections are the most common cause of emergency surgeries at our clinic. One of the most important factors in a successful outcome is time, the quicker we can get a horse to surgery the better the prognosis, which is why it is important to understand the signs to look for.



Wounds

Wounds over the lower parts of the legs are very common and the lack of muscle covering these lower joints makes the horse more susceptible to damage. The thin joint and tendon sheath capsules that hold the fluid within both the joints and tendon sheaths are directly underneath the skin which means that they are more easily involved in a wound.

When a wound, (of any size, including puncture wounds), extends into a joint or tendon sheath there is a quick, irreversible deterioration within the joint that takes place. The joint fluid and environment provides the perfect environment for the bacteria, which then take up residence within the fluid and the lining of the joint capsule.

The horse's body tries to deal with this infection by producing more fluid to wash out the infection but more importantly a huge number of white blood cells are forced into this joint space to try and mop up the bacteria. Along with the white blood cells (neutrophils) there is also a whole cascade on different inflammatory enzymes which unfortunately also then damage the joint further.