

Pain Recognition in Horses with Osteoarthritis

Your horse has been diagnosed with osteoarthritis and has been prescribed non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication - Phenylbutazone = 'Bute' (Danilon/Equipalazone/Butagran/Chanazone).



Most horses diagnosed with osteoarthritis receiving treatment with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication can continue to have a good quality of life for many years.

It is however important that you pay close attention to your horse's behaviour and watch out for signs that your horse may be in pain as these signs are often subtle but can affect your horse's quality of life.

What to look out for

- Change in behaviour, seeming quieter or grumpier than before
- Struggling to get up after rolling/lying down
- Not seeing your horse rolling in the field or signs they have been lying down
- Lagging behind field mates
- Keeping distance from field mates
- Change in social hierarchy, becoming bottom of the pecking order
- No longer trotting off in the morning when turned out in the field
- Walking slowly or stiffly
- Standing/walking with neck lowered
- Losing weight and/or muscle
- Increased respiratory rate when walking in from the field
- Difficulty picking out feet or with the farrier

Phenylbutazone is a prescription only medication therefore as a minimum we require to re-examine your horse 6 monthly whilst receiving this medication. These examinations provide a good opportunity for a general health check and for your veterinary surgeon to assess your horse to ensure they are on the correct dose of medication.

Extra time can be allocated to combine these examinations with vaccination and dental appointments. Sometimes changes in your horse are not obvious when you are spending time with your horse on daily basis and if we are seeing your horse regularly we can help pick up on these changes.

It is very important that you do not increase your horse's dose of medication without discussion with your veterinary surgeon. Contact your vet if you notice any of the following clinical signs whilst your horse is receiving phenylbutazone:

- Loose droppings or diarrhoea - this can be a sign of ulceration in the colon
- Swelling underneath their belly or sheath in geldings can be a sign of protein loss as a result of ulceration in the colon
- Your horse drinking and urinating more than normal can be a sign of kidney disease