MAYES & SCRINE
EQUINE VETERINARY PRACTICE



NEWSLETTER

WINTER | DECEMBER 2025

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Our Quarterly Update

Festive Season Care – We're Here 24/7

The festive season is a special time for all of us but we know that horses don't take a holiday from health concerns. Whether it's a sudden injury, colic, or urgent lameness, our team of experienced equine vets is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, throughout the holidays.

While you enjoy the celebrations with family, friends and your horses, rest assured that expert care is just a phone call away. Our dedicated team is ready to respond promptly, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of your horses, anytime, any day.



MAYES & SCRINE
EQUINE VETERINARY PRACTICE

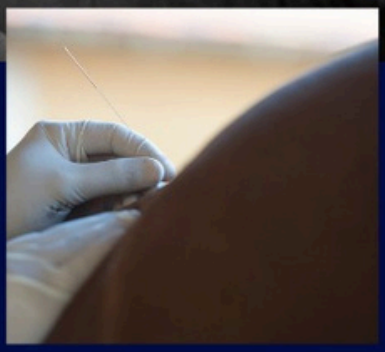
Discover the Benefits of Equine Acupuncture

Join Clinical Director, Debbie Jackson for an evening all about equine acupuncture.

Learn how this holistic therapy can enhance your horse's well-being, improve performance and support overall health.

Tuesday, 9th December
6:30 PM
Mayes Scrine Equine Veterinary Practice, Dawes Farm, Bognor Rd, Horsham RH12 3ZG





Our Quarterly Update

Esmé Achieves ILM Level 5 Certificate in Veterinary Leadership & Practice Finance



One of our administrators, Esmé, completed a VMG/ILM Level 5 Certificate in Veterinary Leadership & Management with a specific focus in Practice Finance.

This was a year-long course, and she has gained a globally recognised ILM qualification. She learned about developing personal leadership skills and understanding leadership within the organisation, focusing on assessing organisational finance, planning processes and performance, budget construction and evaluation, use of appropriate financial measures and formulating financial cases for projects.

She completed this alongside working full time, which is a great achievement!



Early Bird Offer: Colt Castrations at Reduced Rate – Monday 23rd March 2026

Early call for any client considering castrating their colts in the New Year: As part of a BEVA CPD course, we will be offering Colt Castrations on Monday 23rd March 2026 at a greatly reduced price of £100.00 per horse.

Spaces will be limited and subject to availability. Colts must have two descended testicles.

Please contact the practice on 01306 628222 for more information and to secure your place.



Colic Myths Debunked

Separating Facts from Fiction

Few words strike more fear into a horse owner's heart than colic. It's one of the most common and concerning emergencies that vets are called to. But with so much information (and misinformation) out there, it's easy for myths to muddy the facts. Let's clear up some of the biggest misconceptions about colic and uncover what really causes a horse's abdominal pain.

Myth 1: Colic is a disease

Truth: Colic isn't a disease, it's a symptom.
The term colic simply means abdominal pain. This discomfort can stem from many different causes, from gas build-up and gut spasms to impactions or even more serious intestinal twists. Understanding that colic is a sign of something wrong, not a diagnosis itself, is the first step toward effective prevention and treatment.

Myth 2: Only horses on poor diets get colic

Truth: Even the best-fed horse can suffer from colic.
While diet certainly plays a role, colic can be triggered by many other factors, such as sudden changes in feed, reduced water intake, dental problems, parasites, stress, or lack of movement. Horses evolved to graze continuously, so anything that interrupts their natural eating and digestive rhythm can cause trouble.
Vet tip: Make feed changes gradually over at least 7–10 days, ensure constant access to clean water and ensure turnout or gentle exercise to keep the gut moving.



Myth 3: Feeding after exercise causes colic

Truth: Feeding a horse after exercise isn't a problem, as long as you do it sensibly.
What matters most is that your horse has cooled down properly before eating a full meal. Allowing them to catch their breath, dry off and relax for 20–30 minutes before feeding is enough. In fact, providing forage before and after work can actually protect the stomach by keeping acid levels balanced.

Colic Myths Debunked cont...





Myth 4: If a horse passes droppings, it's not colic

Truth: Passing droppings doesn't rule out colic.
Some horses with mild or early colic may continue to pass faeces. The type and amount of droppings, as well as the horse's overall behaviour, are far more important clues. If your horse is off their food, pawing, rolling, or showing signs of discomfort, even if they've passed droppings, don't ignore it.

Always call your vet if you suspect colic. Prompt assessment can make all the difference.

Myth 5: Walking the horse will "fix" colic

Truth: Gentle walking can help some cases, but it's not a cure.
Light walking may ease mild gas colic by keeping the gut moving, but it won't resolve an impaction or twisted intestine. More importantly, walking shouldn't delay a call to your vet. If your horse is in severe pain, it's safer to keep them quiet until professional help arrives.

Myth 6: Once a horse has had colic, it's more likely to experience it again

Truth: Not necessarily!
Some horses are more prone to colic due to management factors or individual issues, but most recover fully and go on to lead healthy lives. Working with your vet to identify possible triggers, dietary, dental, or environmental, can greatly reduce the risk of recurrence.

Takeaway: Knowledge and prevention go hand in hand

Understanding what really causes colic helps you focus on prevention: consistent feeding routines, regular dental care, access to water and turnout and careful observation of any changes in your horse's behaviour or droppings.

Colic can be serious, but most cases respond well with early veterinary attention. Don't let myths stand in the way, trust the facts, stay observant and when in doubt, seek veterinary advice, in all cases.



Is My Horse Fit Enough?

How Vets Measure Fitness Beyond the Stopwatch

Every horse owner wants their horse to perform and feel their best, but true fitness is more than speed or stamina- it's about how efficiently the body responds to and recovers from exercise. That's where veterinary fitness assessments come in.

Beyond the Stopwatch

Timing how fast or how long your horse works gives limited insight. Horses can mask fatigue or compensate in ways that increase injury risk. Vets look deeper, using science-based tests to assess overall fitness and wellbeing.

Heart Rate Recovery: The Key Indicator

A fit horse's heart rate returns to normal quickly after exercise. Slow recovery may suggest overexertion, poor conditioning, or health issues.

By tracking heart rate at rest, during work and in recovery, vets can assess:

- **Aerobic fitness –** oxygen use efficiency
- **Training response –** stamina building without overload
- **Early warning signs –** fatigue or stress before injury occurs

For instance, a fit sport horse's heart rate might drop from 180 bpm to 60–70 bpm within 15–20 minutes; an unfit horse may take much longer.

Comprehensive Veterinary Fitness Assessments

Beyond heart rate, vets may also assess:

- Muscle tone, joint health and breathing
- Blood test for inflammation or fatigue
- Gait and movement patterns
- Respiratory efficiency and ECG (electrocardiogram) results
- Imaging for soft tissue or joint strain
- Muscle enzyme and flexibility tests
- Body condition and nutrition balance

These insights allow tailored training, rest and recovery plans, improving performance safely.

Training Smarter, Not Harder

Fitness is a balance between work and recovery. Veterinary assessments help prevent injury, boost stamina and ensure readiness for competition or leisure riding.

When to Call Your Vet

If your horse tires easily, struggles to recover, or underperforms despite training, it's time for a professional fitness check.

Book a veterinary fitness assessment today to keep your horse fit, healthy and performing at their best.



Respiratory Health in the Stabled Horse

Minimising Coughs and Irritation

As horses spend more time indoors during colder months, respiratory health becomes a key concern. Stabled horses are prone to coughs and airway irritation from dust, poor ventilation, and bedding materials, but simple management steps and veterinary guidance can greatly reduce the risks.

Understanding the Risks

Horses' sensitive lungs can be easily irritated by airborne dust, mould, and ammonia. Even healthy horses may cough occasionally, while those with existing conditions are more vulnerable to serious problems.

Ventilation: Fresh Air is Key

Good airflow removes dust and moisture. Improve ventilation by:

- Opening windows or doors when safe
- Installing roofline vents to let warm, damp air escape

Even small improvements in airflow can make a big difference.

Dust: Minimising Exposure

Reduce dust from feed and bedding by:

- Soaking or steaming hay, or feeding haylage
- Using hay nets or feeders instead of placing hay on the floor

Bedding Choices

- Straw: Dusty unless dust-extracted or well-stored
- Shavings: Generally cleaner
- Paper/Pelleted Bedding: Best for sensitive horses

The Vet's Role

Vets can:

- Diagnose issues through examinations or tests
- Provide treatments such as anti-inflammatories or medications to open the airway
- Advise on stable setup, feed and bedding
- Monitor respiratory health with regular check-ups

Monitoring and Early Action

Watch for coughing, nasal discharge, or poor performance. If these appear, consult your vet early to prevent chronic problems.

The Hidden Risks of Winter Weight Gain (and Loss)

A Vet's Guide to Healthy Condition Through the Cold Season



As the days shorten and the temperatures drop, horse owners often focus on keeping their animals warm and comfortable. But winter brings subtle challenges that can quietly affect your horse's health, particularly when it comes to weight management. Both unexpected weight gain and weight loss can occur and understanding the underlying factors is key to keeping your horse in optimal condition.

How Cold Weather Affects Calorie Needs

In winter, horses expend more energy to maintain body temperature. This increased demand can lead some owners to feed more, assuming "more hay = more warmth." While forage is essential, overfeeding high-calorie concentrates can push some horses beyond their ideal weight. Conversely, horses with a lighter coat or those exposed to harsh winds may burn calories faster than expected, risking unhealthy weight loss.

Metabolism and Seasonal Changes

Horses are naturally adapted to seasonal changes. In colder months, their metabolism may slow slightly, conserving energy. However, individual differences mean some horses gain weight easily in winter while others struggle to maintain condition. Factors like age and activity level all play a role.

The Hidden Risks of Winter Weight Gain (and Loss) cont...

Body Condition Scoring: Your Best Monitoring Tool

Regular body condition scoring is critical in winter. This hands-on assessment evaluates fat coverage over areas like the ribs, neck and pelvis. Scoring should be done consistently, ideally monthly, to spot subtle changes early. A horse that gains or loses more than 5–10% of its ideal body weight in a few months may require dietary or management adjustments. See next page for a body scoring chart.

Practical Tips for Maintaining a Healthy Winter Weight

- **Balance Forage and Concentrates:** Base the diet primarily on high-quality forage. Supplement with concentrates only if weight gain is insufficient or activity levels demand it
- **Monitor Body Condition Closely:** Use a body condition score chart and weigh tape where possible. Record changes to track trends over the season
- **Adjust Feeding to Activity:** Horses kept in work or competing in colder months may need extra calories, while leisure horses may require less to avoid fat accumulation
- **Don't Forget Water:** Cold weather can reduce water intake, which affects digestion and metabolism. Provide fresh, unfrozen water consistently
- **Consider Turnout and Rugging:** Appropriate turnout allows natural exercise and grazing, but avoid 'over' rugging that may reduce calorie expenditure and encourage weight gain
- **Consult Your Vet:** Your vet can create a tailored winter feeding plan for your horse

The Bottom Line

Winter doesn't just bring cold, it brings hidden risks to your horse's weight and overall health. With careful observation, regular condition scoring and thoughtful diet management, you can help your horse stay comfortable and healthy through the season.

Remember

Subtle changes over weeks can have a big impact over months. Being proactive now prevents problems later and ensures your horse enters spring in peak condition.

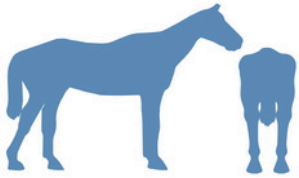
Please note some weight loss is natural, normal and desirable over winter.



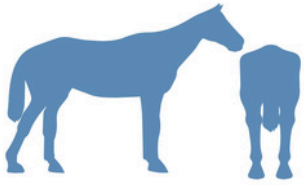
EQUINE
WEIGHT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

Body Fat Scoring

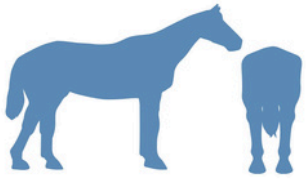
0 Emaciated
- Prominent spinous processes, ribs, tail-head
- Prominent withers, shoulders and neck
- No fatty tissue can be palpated



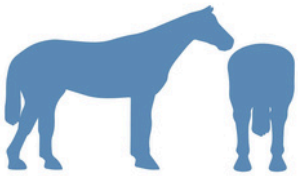
1 Thin
- Slightly less emaciated
- Slight fat covering over base of spinous processes
- Transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded
- Withers, shoulders and neck faintly noticeable



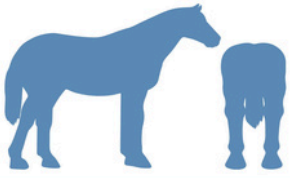
2 Lean
- A slightly narrow neck
- Ribs just visible and can be felt
- A thin coating of fat covering the entire body
- You can feel the spine
- Croup well defined



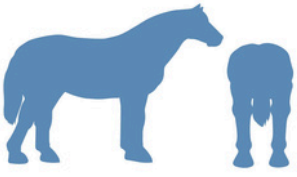
3 Moderate
- No crest
- Ribs cannot be visually distinguished but can be easily felt
- Withers appear rounded over spinous processes
- Shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body shape



4 Fat
- Crease along back
- Difficult to palpate ribs
- Fat around tail-head is very soft
- Noticeable thickening of the neck and cresty appearance



5 Obese
- Obvious crease along back
- Patchy fat appearing over ribs
- Bulging fat around: *tail-head, along withers, behind shoulders and along neck*
- Fat along inner buttocks
- Large crest









Joint Health Through the Cold Months

Keeping Your Horse Comfortable and Mobile

As the temperatures drop and the nights draw in, many horse owners notice subtle, or sometimes not-so-subtle, changes in their horse's movement. Cold weather can exacerbate joint stiffness and discomfort, particularly in older horses or those with underlying joint conditions such as arthritis or previous injuries. Understanding how low temperatures affect your horse's mobility and what you can do to support joint health, is essential for keeping them comfortable through the winter months.

How Cold Weather Affects Joints

Just like in humans, cold weather can make horse joints feel stiffer. This is largely due to:

- **Reduced blood flow:** Lower temperatures can slow circulation, limiting the nutrients and oxygen that help maintain healthy joints
- **Muscle stiffness:** Cold muscles are less supple, making joints feel tighter and increasing the risk of injury

Horses may show subtle signs such as:

- Shorter, stiffer strides or reluctance to move
- Hesitation on turns or when stepping over obstacles
- Increased sensitivity when grooming around joints



Joint Health Through the Cold Months cont...



Managing Joint Health in Cold Weather

There are several strategies to help your horse maintain comfort and mobility through the winter:

1. Warm-Up and Exercise

- Longer, gentle warm-ups are vital. Walking for 10–15 minutes before trotting or cantering helps loosen muscles and joints
- Consistent movement prevents stiffness. Horses that are stabled for long periods are more likely to develop cold-related discomfort

2. Environment and Bedding

- Provide dry, well-bedded areas. Damp or icy conditions can worsen joint stiffness
- Shelter from wind and rain helps prevent cold-induced muscle tension

3. Nutrition and Supplements

- Adequate protein and energy intake supports muscle and joint health
- Some horses benefit from joint supplements, though always discuss with your vet before starting new supplements

4. Cold-Weather Care

- Use rugs thoughtfully: Well-fitting rugs can reduce muscle stiffness, but ensure they don't restrict movement

5. Veterinary Support

- Early intervention is key. If you notice persistent stiffness, swelling, or reluctance to move, your vet can advise on diagnostic imaging, targeted treatments, or tailored exercise programmes
- There is a wide range of options that exist for horses with arthritis and your vet will be able to advise which ones are best suited to your horse's needs

Key Takeaway

Winter doesn't have to mean a decline in your horse's comfort or performance. With proactive management most horses can remain mobile and happy, even when the thermometer drops.