



Maintenance Exams, Stop Problems Before They Start

Today's equine athlete is asked to perform at a high level and asked to do this consistently. Problems will arise and your trusted equine sports medicine veterinarian can be a valuable part of your team. Regular maintenance exams with your veterinarian can help pinpoint subtle issues and keep your team on track.

Your maintenance exam can include a discussion on preventive medicine to determine the best plan on deworming, vaccinations and other routine procedures. Today's equine athletes have an increased exposure to a long list of ailments and are traveling further, so a good preventive medicine schedule is essential to keeping them healthy. These athletes may require more frequent vaccinations against diseases such as influenza and rhinopneumonitis. Conditioning and maintaining adequate body weight can be difficult for some horses due to the demands of their sport so an open conversation with your veterinarian about your horses diet/supplementation, deworming routine, dental exams or floating can help highlight areas that need improvement. For example, some horses are prone to recurrent tying up and can benefit from a diet adjusted to fit their needs including additional supplements such as fat and vitamin E.

A thorough maintenance exam will include a lameness or flexion exam. Some injuries occur long be-

fore outward signs of lameness, so early detection for an injury can help prevent further damage and prolonged healing times. Repetitive motion injuries are a common finding as today's equine athletes are asked to perform the same motion or movement over and over. Standing and visual inspection of the limbs including flexion and palpation is performed to assess any areas of swelling or pain. Hoof testing is performed to evaluate the feet and to open discussion on any recent shoeing changes or concerns. Next, jogging the horse in circles and straight lines is done to establish a baseline of the horse's movement and level of comfort. Subsequently, active flexion of all four limbs is performed to help detect any soreness not evident on the baseline exam. Any lameness or soreness can be further evaluated using diagnostic blocks, radiography, and/or ultrasound. Some lameness or injuries are similar in appearance, but are different in origin. Diagnostic blocks can help pinpoint the specific area of concern. Further evaluation with radiography or ultrasound may be needed to help determine the extent of the injury so the appropriate treatment and therapy can be given. Sometimes additional diagnostics, such as a bone scan, cat scan (CT) or MRI,



may be recommended to obtain a better diagnosis and understanding of the extent of the injury. There is an open discussion between you and your veterinarian at this time to agree to what is best for your horse.

Not all soreness or lameness is due to injuries of the limbs. Careful attention should be given to soreness or complaints involving the mouth/head, neck, back, and pelvis. It is not uncommon for horses to object due to ailments of the mouth and ears. Younger horses can require more frequent dental exams due to the normal progression of losing teeth or needing wolf teeth or retained caps removed. Neck and back injuries, acute and chronic, can present in a wide range of gait abnormalities or even unacceptable behavior. Even neurological illnesses, such as EPM, can present as lameness or an injury. Various treatment options and therapies are available to keep your equine athlete in top shape and will be discussed in later articles.

For questions, regarding maintenance exams for your equine athlete, please feel free to call one of Brazos Valley Equine Hospitals locations or visit bveh.com.