

## MANAGEMENT TIPS TO REDUCE GASTRIC ULCER FORMATION



- Once diagnosed by gastroscopy gastric ulcers can only be effectively treated through use of the drug omeprazole (Gastroguard). This drug reduces the production of stomach acid and the horse will generally be treated for between two and four weeks. This drug is also used prophylactically (preventatively) at times of known risk.
- Horses are trickle feeders and need to eat little and often in order to neutralise/buffer the acid present in the stomach. The best method of achieving this is to allow free-choice access to grass or hay. Turnout is the optimum way to achieve this but may not be appropriate or feasible in all situations.
- If the horse does need to be stabled, hay should be split into many small portions and distributed around the stable to mimic as much as possible the natural grazing situation.
- Lower cereal and higher fibre diets are recommended, especially the inclusion of alfalfa, in order to maximise time spent eating and to lower gastric pH. The addition of vegetable oil to the diet is also helpful.
- Stress is believed to reduce blood flow to the stomach lining, as does illness and travelling or box confinement. This in turn increases the risk of ulcer development. It thus makes sense to reduce stress as much as possible, for example by ensuring access to usual herd-mates when stabled etc.
- Exercise also reduces gastric blood flow and increases pressure within the stomach. This forces the gastric acid on the upper lining of the stomach, where the surface is not so well protected and is therefore more prone to ulceration. The intensity of training should be reduced whilst ulcers are present and prophylactic medications considered at times of high intensity.