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## Preparing Your Horse for Travel

Your trailer is packed, your tack is clean, and you and your horse are ready to hit the road. Whether you are heading to a show, a training clinic, or a group trail ride, have you thought about what may be waiting for you when you get there? This newsletter is focused on the possible contagious diseases, health concerns, and unexpected misadventures commonly encountered when away from the barn. So before you load your horse, please give this a read.

## Travel Stress & Ulcer Prevention

With the multitude of things to prepare before you leave the barn, have you thought about **how your horse will cope** with your travel plans? From the moment he steps onto the trailer, until the time he is brought home, hours, days or weeks later, your horse will be experiencing varying degrees of stress.

There are many sources of stress when away from home, in varying severities, depending on your horse's personality and experience. Sources of stress include the trailer, distance or duration of travel, travel companions, new location, new stall or housing, new neighbouring horses, new smells, sights and sounds, change in feed or water, change in feed schedule, change in exercise schedule, regime or intensity, change in environmental temperatures etc. What this means, is that despite your best efforts, your horse is going to be at risk for developing gastric ulcers while away from home.

Research has shown that horses may develop gastric ulcers in as little as 2 days from an environmental change alone. Moreover, various studies have shown that horses performing higher-intensity exercise are at increased risk of developing squamous gastric ulceration. So what does this mean for your competitive equine athlete? If you have ever experienced the discomfort and distraction of heartburn, you can imagine how challenging it would be for your horse to perform well while experiencing the pain of gastric ulcers. Symptoms can be subtle or overt and may include anything from 'girthiness', nervousness, poor appetite, or poor performance, to weight loss, aggression, teeth grinding or colic.

There are some preventative measures you can use to help reduce stomach acidity and the development of ulcers while away from home. Firstly, try to adhere to your horse's same feed schedule, same feed types, and ensure he is eating and drinking regularly despite the change in regime. Secondly, although it is very convenient to replace some of your horse's hay ration with less cumbersome hay cubes and pellets, the reduction in eating time has deleterious effects. The hay ration, especially if fed in slow feeder hay nets, increases the stomach fill and chewing times which in turn helps provide a bulk buffer against gastric acid as well as increases the production of acid buffer-containing saliva. High grain meals increase the acid production in the stomach and should be avoided or minimized as much as possible. Thirdly, providing your horse with medications to either bind stomach acid or reduce its production will be the most helpful measure in prevention of gastric ulcers. Feeding antacids such as Tums or AcidFx 30 minutes prior to exercise may be helpful for about an hour. Placing your horse on the acid production suppressant, omeprazole, at its ulcer prevention dose, will provide a more effective, longer lasting effect. It is recommended to start treatment the day before travel, give daily, and continue until 2 days after returning home.

If you are interested in learning about Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS), its diagnosis and treatment, more in-depth information can be found at our website's Client Education Section at [www.swiftsureequine.com](http://www.swiftsureequine.com), or if you are concerned your horse may be affected by EGUS, please call our office.



## The Travel Bugs You DON'T Want

When horses arrive at a show or clinic, there is often unavoidable exposure to new or foreign viral or bacterial pathogens. Your horse will be at risk for contracting these common respiratory infections which could have mild to devastating consequences. Here is what to look out for:

- **Influenza Virus:** Influenza is one of the most common respiratory diseases in the horse, and is highly contagious. It can be transmitted from horse to horse **through the air** by coughing or snorting, **over long distances**, as far as 30 meters. The incubation period is typically 4-7 days. Clinical signs may include dry cough, nasal discharge, fever, depression and loss of appetite. Although not typically life threatening, recovery often includes 3-4 weeks of rest which will put a damper on your future travel plans!
- **Equine Herpes Virus (Rhino):** Rhinopneumonitis is transmitted by nasal secretions, aerosolized secretions (snorting) and **anything that comes into contact with the secretions** (people, buckets, tack, walls, water). Like the Flu, Rhino causes respiratory tract infections, fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, nasal discharge and a cough. In addition to these symptoms, EHV-1 may also cause abortion or neurologic disease.
- **Streptococcus equi (Strangles):** Strangles is a **highly contagious** bacterial infection, that can be spread by direct contact, by secretions from horse to horse or human to horse on hands, clothes, bedding, buckets, etc. It mainly affects the upper respiratory tract, but can spread to lymph nodes and other areas in the body. Clinical signs include high fever, depression, thick yellow nasal discharge, enlarged lymph nodes under the jaw and a productive cough. Unbeknownst to the owner, carrier horses can **spread the infection while being asymptomatic**.



Prevention is key through vaccinating at least 1 week before travel, sterilizing shared trailers, stalls and equipment between horses, and minimizing pathogen spread by not sharing equipment and avoiding human contact between horses. Since the incubation period of these pathogens is typically 4-7 days, some horses return home before they start exhibiting illness. The best way to prevent disease spread to your resident horses is to separate the traveling animals upon their return so that they can be monitored for signs of infection. For details check out On Farm Quarantine information pamphlet in our Client Education Section.

### Trailing Tips



It's time to scrub the moss off that trailer, check it over and take it in for its annual maintenance work. When planning your travel schedule, keep in mind the distance, weather & road conditions and your horse's stress level with

trailing. Here are 6 tips for your journey:

**1)** Prior to the trip, familiarize yourself with your horse's baseline temperature, heart and respiratory rates so that they can be monitored throughout the journey. **2)** The goal is to keep your horse's day as close to his routine as possible- so bring your own hay, grain and supplements. **3)** Tie a hay bag low to the ground (without causing risk of a caught hoof) to lower the risk of "shipping fever". **4)** Dress your horse for the journey with a head bumper, shipping bandages and leather halter or use a quick release clip. **5)** Provide water to your horse every 3-4 hours. Bring at least 75L of water on all trips to be used for drinking, treating wounds or cooling your horse off. **6)** At each rest stop assess the air quality in the trailer and adjust the windows, doors and fans accordingly. These basic precautions will help ensure you have a healthy horse upon arrival. For more info visit our website's Client Education Section at [www.swiftsureequine.com](http://www.swiftsureequine.com).

### Fun Fact!!

Did you know horses drink a minimum of **25L per day**, and more on hot days or after physical exertion? That's why it is important to check your horse regularly during travel for signs of dehydration. These can include dry mouth, changes in gum colour, decreased skin elasticity or elevated heart rate. In severe cases they may have a tucked up abdomen.

### Emergency Preparedness

Having a portable First Aid kit is an important asset to any horse owner travelling with their equine companion. A 20L bucket with a lid acts as a great mobile option to fill with your first-aid supplies. Bandages, gauze, gloves and tape are only a few of the essentials you will need. For a complete list visit our website's Client Education Section. Speak to us about adding some prescription medications such as anti-inflammatories or sedatives to your First Aid kit.

A common urgent situation is a pulled shoe. All horses can lose a shoe in pasture or paddock, but it can be a more difficult situation to manage when you are not at home. The first thing is to check that your horse hasn't caused any puncture wounds from the ragged nails. Next, look for any signs of puncture in the sole or frog. Apply standard wound or poultice care at injured sites. If you find an embedded nail, **DON'T PULL IT!** Call the vet first, then your farrier. Remember to find the shoe so your horse doesn't stand on it, causing another injury.



When travelling with horses, dehydration is a common problem. As the saying goes, "You can lead a horse to water..." If you have a horse that doesn't drink well, here are ways to help him: offer soaked hay, add water to pellets, offer extra soupy beet pulp, add 1 Tbsp salt to feed or flavour the water with apple juice or molasses. Packing water from home will also help ensure your horse is well-hydrated while away.

Always make sure you have an emergency plan if your horse experiences a more serious injury or illness while away. It is a good idea to locate vet clinics along your route to find out their hours, emergency services and contact information.