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Anhidrosis in Horses

How to Keep Your Horse Sweating and Keep You in the Saddle!

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Anhidrosis (AKA non-sweating) is a term used to describe the decrease or loss of the ability to sweat in response to increased temperature. This condition is not uncommon for horses in the summer months of Florida. It is estimated that up to twenty five percent of horses in Florida are affected by this condition to a varying degree. Retaining the ability to sweat is crucial for any horse in a hot environment as sweating is the main process by which horses thermoregulate and stay cool. Sixty to seventy five percent of a horses heat dissipation is achieved via sweating, with the respiratory tract contributing fifteen to twenty five percent.

There is currently no known age, sex, breed, or color predisposition that has been identified when it comes to anhidrosis. Non-sweaters tend to have a history of moving from Northern states to the South, and it is also believed that a stressful or traumatic episode can trigger the onset of the condition. Diagnosis is typically achieved by observation of clinical signs, which may include increased respiratory rate, fever, failure to cool after exercise, failure to sweat, or very little sweating during exercise in which significant sweat would be expected.

If a horse is noted to be displaying the mentioned clinical signs, your veterinarian should be called immediately. It is imperative that the horse be cooled off right away as the rise in body temperature can be life threatening. Your veterinarian will likely have you begin cold hosing immediately while they are on their way to the farm. Isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol) may also be poured on the horse to expedite the cooling process. A dose of phenylbutazone (bute) or flunixin meglumine (banamine) may be prescribed by your veterinarian as well although if the cause of the fever is truly due to the bodies inability to cool itself effectively, a systemic anti-inflammatory medication may not be of much benefit. You will want to check the your horse's temperature frequently to ensure the temperature returns to normal (99.5-101.5 F). The horse should be placed in a stall under fans if possible. Because the symptoms of anhidrosis are not specific to this condition, it is always best to have your horse evaluated by your veterinarian as soon as possible to be sure that another disease process is not occurring.

When it comes to treating and managing horses with anhidrosis our options are limited. The best treatment is moving the horse to a state with cooler weather. If this is not an option, acupuncture coupled with herbal therapy is currently thought to be the next best treatment for anhidrosis in horses. A clinical trial performed at the University of Florida showed that horses treated with acupuncture and herbals once weekly regained the ability to sweat as compared to the control group, which received fake acupuncture treatments and hay powder. The ability to sweat in the treated group however did decline within 4 weeks of discontinuing treatment. Therefore, it is wise to continue treatment at least through the hottest months of the summer if your horse is affected by anhidrosis.

From a Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine perspective, anhidrosis is considered an Excess Heat condition termed Summer Heat. This is diagnosed by the presence of a red and dry tongue, fast and superficial right jugular pulse, increased respiratory rate and temperature, and a dull and dry haircoat. The acupuncture treatment is directed at clearing summer heat, opening sweat pores, and nourishing body fluids. Some of the acupuncture points are over veins and excess heat is released when these points are bled.

Every horse will respond differently to the treatment. Some may need acupuncture weekly while others can go every 2-3 weeks during the summer months. Best results are produced when the horse is treated as soon as the condition is first noticed and when the horse receives continued acupuncture treatments even in the winter, about once monthly. If diagnosed and treated early, many horses return to normal sweating and can return to normal work. Once you and your horse begin working with a veterinarian trained in acupuncture you will be able to figure out the best regimen to keep your horse heat tolerant and sweating. Be patient, as occasionally it can take a few treatments before noticeable results are achieved.



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