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By Kevin Fenton, DVM, and Jessica Lynn

A look at the most common types of cancer in horses and some steps you can take to naturally prevent this dreaded disease.

Cancer prevention FOR HORSES

— CAN YOU KEEP THIS DISEASE AT BAY?

Like humans, horses can be affected by many different types of cancer. Perhaps the most common, tumors are often defined as abnormal growths or masses of tissue that continue to grow. Tumors may or may not be responsive to the horse's natural immune response, which controls normal cell growth. They have a wide range of causes such as environmental toxins, pollutants, or too much sunlight on a horse with light skin.

Skin tumors in horses are relatively common in all breeds and ages. They are also the easiest to diagnose and treat, with the three main types being sarcoids, melanomas, and squamous cell carcinomas. The main concern for any horse with a skin tumor is that it will metastasize and affect other parts of the horse's body internally.

Other cancers or metastasized cancers can be found in the oral cavity (including the nasal area), the pituitary gland (Cushing's), kidney, liver, colon, bone and more. Unfortunately, most internal cancers aren't caught until they are very large, at which point they are difficult to treat.

For the purpose of this article, let's take a look at sarcoid and squamous cell carcinomas, as well as some prevention tips for melanoma-prone horses.

WHAT CAUSES CANCER?

Causes of cancer vary widely depending on the type. Most sarcoids appear to be caused by an interaction between the skin surface and the papilloma virus — this virus causes “warts” or wart-like tumors in cattle and horses. Both the overall immune health and genetics of the horse can play a leading role.

Squamous cell carcinoma is thought to be caused by ultraviolet radiation and exposure to tumor-causing carcinogens that horses are exposed to in their environment, including overuse of chemical fly sprays, chemical herbicides used in pastures, herbicides the horse ingests from hay, and/or overuse of chemical wormers that compromise the immune health of a horse.

The exact cause of horse melanomas remains relatively unknown, but because they primarily affect light-colored

horses, it is likely a combination of sunlight exposure and the underlying genetics of the horse.

NATURAL PREVENTION

Cancer is difficult to prevent, but there are a few steps you can take to lower your horse's risk:

- Use SPF-rated fly sheets and masks (ideally with ear and nose pieces) during the day.
- Keep horses stalled or provide plenty of shade between 10am and 3pm.
- Apply baby sunscreen (SPF 50 or higher) to pink noses and areas that might burn.
- Perform routine full-body inspections of your horse to catch growths in their earliest stages. Contact your vet immediately to book a biopsy if you see any suspicious lumps, scaly or flaky skin, etc.
- Feed a healthy diet (see sidebar on page 34).



THE ROLE OF HOMEOPATHIC TREATMENTS/REMEDIES

Homeopathy is a system of medicine that differs substantially from conventional medicine. The word "homeopathy" originates from the Greek words *Homios* (similar) and *Pathos* (suffering). The cornerstone of homeopathic philosophy is that disease in a living creature can be cured by the administration of a substance that when given to a healthy individual would cause similar symptoms to the disease. The fundamental principle *Similia Similibus Curentur* means in Latin "let like be cured by like".

A basic example would be the use of the homeopathic remedy, *Allium cepa*, made from the red onion. We have all experienced the tearing eyes and the burning runny nose

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The importance of nutrition

Nutrition plays a key role in cancer prevention. Invest in a healthy feed and a balanced supplement containing vitamins C, E, copper and zinc, and be sure to provide your horse with plenty of fresh water. Keep in mind that hay begins to lose its nutritional potency once it's cut, so in addition to supplements it can be helpful to offer your horse some herbs to boost his immunity. Echinacea, ashwagandha, rose hips and specific mushroom extracts are known for their immune boosting properties.

Symptoms of cancer in horses

- Nodules or growths on the skin
- Patches of hair loss
- Scaly skin patches
- Ulcerated areas

while working with onions! Those symptoms of increased secretions from the mucous membranes of the eyes and nasal passages are very common in hay fever or a cold and so a homeopath might prescribe *Allium* to someone with these symptoms. The conventional approach might be to try an antihistamine, where the effect of the medicine is contrary or opposite to the symptom. But unfortunately this will not resolve the underlying root cause.

Homeopathy views the patient as a whole — a unity of physical, emotional, and mental parts. In viewing our animal patients in this holistic fashion we seek to understand what “individualizes” their disease process.

Properly selected homeopathic remedies “nudge” the patient’s life force and immune system in a healing direction. Homeopathy is a complementary integrative medicine used not to replace or negate the benefits of conventional cancer treatment but to enhance and optimize healing and recuperation in conjunction with it.

Let’s look at squamous cell carcinomas (SCCs), the second most prevalent type of skin cancer. SCCs can cause ulceration, bleeding, burning and infection involving the muco-cutaneous junction where the skin blends into the sensitive pink membranes of the prepuce/sheath and penis, rectum, lips, oral cavity and eye. The homeopathic remedy for this type of cancer would be Nitric Acidum. Made from

nitric acid, this remedy has an affinity for the intersection of skin and mucous membranes where it causes ulceration and a burning tender sensation.

Thuja is a very commonly utilized remedy in many tumor types because it helps to activate the body’s immune system response to cancer.

Homeopathic Mercury helps in treating the destructive ulcers that are caused by SCC and the more serious type of sarcoid, the fibroblastic sarcoid.

Multiple homeopathic remedies can be used to target particular symptoms of individual cancer types and their effects — burning, bleeding, post-surgical issues, secondary infection, pain and progression of tumor growth. While it’s not a cure, homeopathy can help us at least palliate the repercussions of cancer as it progresses.



Jessica Lynn is the owner of Earth Song Ranch. As a lifelong equestrian and professional animal nutritionist, homeopath, dowser, and animal intuitive, she is rarely separated from her passion and work. Earth Song Ranch is a feed additive and supplement manufacturer based in Southern California, using herbal blends, probiotics, and digestive enzymes for immune health for horses. Jessica has been involved in alternative health care, herbs, homeopathy, and nutrition for animals and humans for over five decades. earthsongranch@yahoo.com, www.earthsongranch.com.

Dr. Kevin Fenton has been a veterinarian for over 30 years using traditional veterinary medicine coupled with homeopathy, acupuncture, chiropractic, essential oils and herbal remedies in his healing practices. He has worked with vets in Italy, Switzerland, Ireland, England and Spain learning multiple approaches to the art of veterinary medicine. He is Medical Director at All Creatures in La Quinta, CA working on small animals, and travels to ranches on weekends to work on horses and farm animals. He is available for constitutional homeopathic work ups or advice. kcritdoc@aol.com, www.drkevinsark.com.