

Arthritis



*Your horses can
get it, too.*



**By Thomas R. Lenz,
D.V.M., M.S.**

AS THE WEATHER HAS TURNED COLDER, I'VE noticed that my 29-year-old American Quarter Horse gelding and I are sharing the same problem first thing in the morning — stiff joints and a touch of arthritis.

The aging process brings on some inevitable changes in horses, like in us, and one of the most common is arthritis. It has been estimated that roughly 20 percent of the horses in the United States are more than 15 years of age, and most can expect to live well into their 30s or beyond. Older horses are subject to a number of health conditions, including a shift in nutritional requirements, that must be managed, but the development of arthritis is one of the most serious.

Arthritis can cause chronic pain, resulting in a decreased ability to eat, walk, and enjoy retirement. Although horses with poor conformation or serious joint injuries during their working life are most prone to the development of arthritis, all horses are at increasing risk with every passing year.

Arthritis

Arthritis is simply inflammation of the articular surfaces of the joint. A horse's joints are covered with an outside protective layer (joint capsule) and an inner layer (synovial membrane) that lubricates the joint cartilage to prevent friction and pain. When the horse applies weight to the joint as it moves forward, the cartilage changes shape to absorb shock and evenly distribute pressure. Through time, repeated concussion may cause joint inflammation. Inflammation leads to the breakdown of the joint cartilage, which can lead to the development of progressive cartilage destruction resulting in pain, stiffness, and swelling of the joint. This is especially true in horses over the age of 15 where a metabolic shift gradually occurs that causes tendons and ligaments to be less elastic and cartilage to be more friable.

Depending on the joints affected, as arthritis develops the horse will show varying degrees of lameness. In old horses, difficulty in getting to their feet in the morning is a

sure sign that they are becoming arthritis, perhaps in several joints.

Treatment

Not all horses have the same conformation or exercise history and so not all horses suffer the same negative affects of aging. Many horses are ridden and worked well into their late 20s while others are arthritic and unable to be ridden much earlier.

My horse was still being ridden in the mountains through his mid-20s and has only been retired for the last three or four years. Treatment varies with the individual horses, but there are some general rules that apply to all. Regular exercise increases circulation of nutrients into and wastes out of the joint. It also strengthens the horse's muscles and improves the horse's attitude, appetite and overall sense of well-being.

Spending most of a horse's time in the pasture is ideal. If younger or more aggressive horses are also in the pasture, older horses should be separated during feeding to ensure they receive an adequate diet. If free exercise in a pasture is not available, turn them out in a paddock for several hours each day or hand walk them as a last resort.

Make their diet joint-friendly by feeding them a well-balanced diet for their unique geriatric requirements. That includes 12-16 percent protein, maintenance levels of calcium (less than 1 percent), and slightly elevated phosphorus content (about 0.4 to 0.65 percent), maintaining a ratio of close to 1.5:1.

Supplementing with soybean meal is a good choice for providing additional protein, and corn oil (1/2-1 cup per day) is a good energy source in thin horses. Introduce it gradually over a couple of weeks.

Pain Management

Pain and stiffness can be managed by the administration of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as phenylbutazone (bute), flunixin meglumine, aspirin, ketoprofen, etc.

Keep in mind that these drugs must be used judiciously as long-term use can cause gastrointestinal or kidney problems. However, when used judiciously and periodically they can be very useful. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 409]



For more information on keeping your horse healthy, consult an American Association of Equine Practitioners-member veterinarian in your area. For a list of members, log onto www.aaep.org.

Good Looking Using Horses with a Walking Stick on the Left Thigh

WAGON WHEEL RANCH
QUARTER HORSES

2007 Online Fall & Winter Sale!

SEE OUR ONLINE CATALOG @ GISTHORSES.COM
FEATURING: 2007 FOALS, STALLIONS, MARES, & GELDINGS.

Preserving Bloodlines of the Legendary Sires:
King P-234
Leo
Joe Hancock
Two Eyed Jack
Mr San Peppy
Bert

COME SEE OUR HORSES AT THE RANCH IN CENTRAL TEXAS!

"Producers & Performers"

CALL US TODAY FOR DETAILS!
TOLL FREE **888.594.6773**
(432.682.3120)

We offer you breeding horses that consistently reproduce themselves; performance horses that really can perform; and genetic super-horses that do all of the above!

High Percentages of the Legendary Sires: King P-234*, Two Eyed Jack, Joe Hancock, Red Man, Blue Valentine*, Leo, Mr San Peppy, Bert, Three Bars (TB)*, Top Deck (TB)*
[*Highest % in the WORLD!]

"MOST INTELLIGENT HORSE I'VE EVER RIDDEN"
"LEVEL-HEADED AND VERSATILE"

www.gisthorses.com

QUARTER'S WORTH

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 490]

horse's hooves polished shiny black. She may have gotten a few sneers until she won everything in sight.

Yes, things were changing even back then.

Remember that striking young trainer who hauled truck loads of horses to the shows and always went home with a whole bunch of trophies? He was a real cowboy, who truly grew up in the saddle, and everyone knew him. He always wore well-fitting blue jeans tucked neatly in his tall, red-topped cowboy boots, spurs jingling as he walked. He set a fashion statement of his own with his custom western shirts, often tastefully designed with flowered prints. It was told that his wife hand-made his shirts. If so, she might have been one of the first of what has become a big custom clothing business.

These are just a few of the interesting recollections, told by the two old cowboys, of the people and horses that were the real deal. AQHA takes immense pride and puts a great deal of effort into perpetuating the western heritage of the Quarter Horse. The American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum is filled with memorabilia of horses and people who have made great contributions to the

quality, formation and image of the Quarter Horse and the AQHA.

To ensure the continuation of the western image, AQHA has a rule established that requires western attire in the show arena for all western events. Let us respectfully remember the cowboys, ranchers and trainers who bred, raced and worked cattle with the early-day Quarter Horse. Through their selective breeding and careful infusion of the Thoroughbred blood, the extremely high-quality horses we enjoy today have evolved. Many of the difficult and exciting events we compete in today originated from the everyday tasks of working cattle and branding done by the early-day cowboys. Many of the old-time horsemen would probably marvel at the extremely high level of performance today's Quarter Horse can achieve.

From the 14.2-hand cutting horse to the 17-hand English riding horses, we now have some of the most elite specialists of all time, with the ability and splendor we can be proud of. And we still have the all-around horses that are so versatile that they can perform at a high level in several disciplines – even being called the "Super Horse." Most may not be at the extreme level of the specialists, but the number of participants showing in the all-around events gives acknowledgment to their popularity.

I like the strategy used by a skilled and show savvy horse exhibitor when first entering the show arena for a rail class – confident, alert and well poised with eyes quickly scanning the entire arena for the location of the judges, spacing of the other horses, potential problem areas to avoid and with a mental plan of action.

I think this strategy would serve us well to ensure that we stay properly focused in the ongoing challenge to competently breed and show the Quarter Horse in a prideful, productive and profitable manner.

Ed Thomson has been involved with the horse industry for decades. To comment, write to aqhajrnl@aqha.org.

HORSE HEALTH

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10]

Ending Thoughts

As you can see, management of arthritis in an older horse can be complex. It starts with an appropriate diet and should involve a good regimen of exercise and rest. The choice of medical treatment options is a decision you and your veterinarian should make together after examining your horse and determining its specific needs.