Osteochondrosis: Is it the end of the world?

Osteochondrosis (OCD) is a condition that occurs in young horses, often during the first year of life. It is characterized by a failure of the endochondral bone to properly calcify and harden. This results in a flap of cartilage, also known as an OCD fragment, that may displace away from the joint surface. Causes of osteochondrosis in young horses are quite diverse and include dietary mismanagement, traumatic injuries, inadequate exercise, and genetic factors. The exact cause of osteochondrosis is not fully understood, but several factors have been implicated in its development, such as rapid growth, improper calcification of cartilage, and genetic predispositions.

One of the interesting things about this disorder is how frequently it may actually be seen in young horses. In one of our recent studies, we found an incidence of 32% in Hanoverian Warmbloods. However, there isn’t always a correlation between radiographic findings of OCD and lameness. Indeed, in a recent study of Dutch Warmblood horses presenting for a pre-breeding soundness evaluation, 25% of European foals will develop an OCD (Barnevald and van Weeren), while others may never develop the condition. The presence of OCD in horses is not always indicative of lameness, and some horses may be completely asymptomatic despite having OCD lesions.

Osteochondrosis may be weaned and put on a less calorie rich diet. Additionally, the foal may be muzzled periodically to decrease his milk intake, or the foal may be removed from the dam for a period of time to allow for proper development of bone cysts or osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD). While these measures may help reduce the severity of the condition, there is no cure once the OCD fragment has displaced away from the joint surface. Causes of osteochondrosis in young horses are quite diverse and include dietary mismanagement, traumatic injuries, inadequate exercise, and genetic factors.

Foals can be born with flexural limb deformities, or they may develop later in life. If you suspect your nutrition program is at fault, please consult with an equine nutritionist! However, I cannot stress this enough, do not try to treat limb deformities without a veterinarian.

Flexural limb deformities are a form of the disease where the front legs are pulled one way and the hind legs are pulled the other. The cause of this condition is unknown, but some factors that may contribute to its development include rapid growth, improper calcification of cartilage, and genetic predispositions. The treatment for flexural limb deformities is variable and depends on the severity of the condition. In mild cases, it may be possible to manage the condition with rest and limited exercise. In more severe cases, surgery may be necessary to realign the long bones. It can also be completely normal to see young horses having temporary periods of being ataxic. If the horse has a sound signs of being ataxic over a period of time, the side of the horse should be evaluated for malformations that could contribute to the issue.

Best month will seek at what we can do to assist you our thanks from assisting with many developmental disabilities.

EQUIINE NEWS                         July 2017

In This ISSUE!

Osteochondrosis in Growing Horses

Eric March, PhD

The OSU Veterinary Medical Hospital has been serving horse owners since 1948. We offer a wide range of services to help owners meet the unique needs of their horses. Our services include medical and surgical treatments, rehabilitation, and training options. In this issue, we will talk about a few other limb abnormalities that you may see in your young growing horses. However, I cannot stress this enough, do not try to treat limb deformities without a veterinarian.

Growing Horses

Limb Abnormalities in Growing Horses

In May's edition we will talk about a few other limb abnormalities that you may see in your young growing horses. However, I cannot stress this enough, do not try to treat limb deformities without a veterinarian.