



MANAGEMENT OF SUMMER EQUINE ALLERGIES

In this final instalment of our 3 blogs on equine summer allergies, we look at ways to help to manage horses with allergic conditions. If you missed parts 1 and 2 on the symptoms, diagnosis, and why to test, they can be found here nextmunelaboratories.co.uk/news/

Broadly speaking, management can be split into two different approaches:

1. **Proactive** - before symptoms occur, to try and prevent or reduce the allergic reaction.
2. **Reactive** - therapies to treat the allergic response once it has happened.

PROACTIVE THERAPIES – PREVENT OR REDUCE THE REACTION

ALLERGEN AVOIDANCE

This involves reducing the amount of contact your horse has with the allergens causing their symptoms. Below are some hints and tips to help avoid common summer outdoor allergens. If your horse's symptoms are present all year round, or indoor allergens such as dust mites or moulds have been identified, you might find this further information helpful: nextmunelaboratories.co.uk/2018/10/16/household-horrors/



Flying, biting insects

- Plan turn out for when the biting insects relevant to your horse are least active
- Use fly products which repel as well as kill insects and re-apply these as instructed by product (e.g after rain / excess sweating)
- Use fine mesh screens, fans and fly tape in the stable if safe to do so
- Ensure fly rugs are a good fit as rubbed sore areas may get infected and attract flies
- Use ear nets, face masks, belly bands or tail covers
- Keep fly rugs free from tears, mud and faecal contamination (this attracts flies / allows access) and change them frequently



Grass, tree, and weed pollens

- A pollen nose net can be helpful when horses are out at grass or during exercise; try to avoid exercising when the pollen count is high
- If tree pollens are an issue: try to turnout away from trees, keep trees and hedge lines well cut to limit flowering and avoid wooded areas when exercising your horse
- Be aware that tree pollens are seasonal, with many species flowering earlier in the year than grasses or weeds
- If grass and weed pollens are an issue: consider stabling horses when grass is being cut/crops are being harvested nearby, avoid exercising on paths with long, and flowering grasses/weeds and keep the paddock weed free

Avoiding allergens is the most logical solution to prevent your horse from reacting, however there will always be times where this is difficult whether that is due to time pressure, the location of your stabling or grazing restrictions, or your horse's behaviour. Often additional measures need to be considered to help manage your horse's symptoms.

ALLERGEN-SPECIFIC IMMUNOTHERAPY (ASIT)

If the individual allergens have been identified ASIT can then be used and has been found to be beneficial in around 60-80% of horses. As discussed in the last blog, identification of allergens can be done either by a blood test (serological testing) or a series of injections into the skin (intradermal testing). The allergens thought to be contributing to the symptoms are then selected and can then be made into a bespoke, individual treatment which is used to gradually desensitise the horse to the suspected problem allergens. It takes a number of months for this therapy to become effective so other treatments are often needed alongside at least initially.

ESSENTIAL FATTY ACID SUPPLEMENTS

Supplementation with essential fatty acids has been shown to be beneficial in some horses. They are believed to both help support the structure of the skin and may also have a mild anti-inflammatory effect. Although usually not effective enough to be used alone, they may reduce the amount of other medications needed.

REACTIVE THERAPIES – TREAT AFTER THE REACTION

STEROIDS

- Steroids are commonly used to 'dampen down' the immune response to allergens. They are usually very effective in offering short-term relief from allergic symptoms. If used longer-term they can cause side-effects in some horses and they cannot be used under FEI rules. These can be given by injection, orally or locally (by inhaler for respiratory problems or a topical spray for itchy horses). Local use greatly reduces the risk of side-effects.

ANTIHISTAMINES

- Antihistamines can be effective for some horses but their effects are very variable. They are usually not effective enough when used on their own but may reduce the amount of other medications needed.

TOPICAL THERAPIES

- Shampoos and sprays can be used to help maintain and support the skin; some will also have a strong antibacterial effect to control infections. In addition, certain biting insects are not able to bite through layers of oil, so using particular products may help by providing a protective layer on the skin.

Your own vet is best placed to help you determine what the best management strategy will be, taking into consideration factors such as: your horse's previous response to treatment, the costs involved, your horse's temperament and your available time, other conditions your horse has, the severity of symptoms and the local yard/environmental conditions. The optimal end result is often achieved using a combination of the options above and thinking about both long-term control of the condition and how to cope with flare-ups of the symptoms when these occur.

To stay up to date with the latest news and guidance on Equine Allergy visit our [website](https://www.nextmunelaboratories.co.uk).