

# Esophageal Impaction (Choke)

## General Information

Choke is an impaction or obstruction of the esophagus, usually caused by a bolus or lump of food. It is not a tracheal (windpipe) obstruction, which impairs breathing. Your horse cannot swallow but *can* still breath normally. A common sign of choke is food or food-stained saliva exiting the mouth and both nostrils.

## Important Points in Treatment

- \_\_\_ Remove all feed and water.
- \_\_\_ Keep your horse in stall or paddock free of any bedding, feed and water so your horse cannot eat, as any food could slide down the open windpipe, causing aspiration pneumonia.
- \_\_\_ Patience is important. Choke sometimes resolves spontaneously without intervention, but may still need anti-inflammatories and antibiotics to prevent an aspiration pneumonia.
- \_\_\_ If a choke occurs for longer than 20min, medical intervention is needed to relieve the obstruction. Call our office immediately. You may elect to call us right away if you are unsure how long the horse has been obstructed.
- \_\_\_ The impacted area of the esophagus can erode, forming an ulcer that heals with some constriction. This constriction could lead to recurrent choke or problems in swallowing feed.
- \_\_\_ After the choke has been resolved, provide no food for 24 hrs, then soft, mushy feed, such as bran mash or soaked Senior feed for 4 days. Feed horse in a pan on the ground.
- \_\_\_ Choke can recur. If eating too fast is a contributing cause, put some large (6-inch) stones in with the feed or put hay in a tight hay net (or bag). This forces the horse to eat slowly.

## Call Our Office If:

- You have any questions concerning esophageal impaction.
- Your horse refused to eat or has difficulty swallowing after apparent recovery.
- Your horse develops a cough and/or a rectal temperature above 102 F.