

SARCOIDS

Sarcoids are a form of benign skin tumour that occurs in horses.

They will not spread throughout the horse via the bloodstream but can invade tissues and multiply locally and horses with one sarcoid may be prone to others in different locations. They can ulcerate and bleed and cause local irritation.

The appearance of a sarcoid can vary greatly, here are some examples of the main types:

1. Occult
2. Verrucose
3. Nodular
4. Fibroblastic.

It is thought there may be a viral component in the initiation of sarcoids, although there may be some genetic factors too, as certain genetic families seem to have a pre-disposition.

Occasionally 'proud flesh' found in slow healing wounds can transform into sarcoid tissue.



If you are looking to buy a horse with a sarcoid, please seek advice from a veterinarian. Sarcoids are rarely performance limiting, although they can be irritating, and can be expensive and time-consuming to treat.

Treatment

If you research treatment of sarcoids you will find many different options, ranging from herbal/homeopathic remedies to surgery. The truth is that no one treatment will treat all sarcoids, and they can vary widely in behaviour.

Rarely a sarcoid will be recognized and removed by the horse's own immune system with no intervention. It is important not to 'trial' lots of treatments on your horse's sarcoid, as any trauma may cause the sarcoid to react and grow faster or spread.

In most cases, it is worth asking your vet to look at any potential sarcoids and treating them when they are small. This will give the best cosmetic results, and lessen the likelihood of reoccurrence.

Treating sarcoids can be very expensive.

When treating a sarcoid it is important to remember that reoccurrence at the same site is possible after any treatment. The treatment options we use with the greatest success are:

1. Laser treatment. The sarcoid is removed with a laser, which burns a small amount of tissue as it cuts. This prevents excess bleeding and also ensures tumour cells are not seeded through the surgery site. The sarcoid is immediately removed; there is normally a skin wound which is left open to heal in time.



2. Surgery with cryotherapy. This is when the sarcoid is removed surgically and the bed of tissue is treated with liquid nitrogen to freeze any remaining cells. The surgical site then is left to heal.
3. Liverpool cream. A photo is sent to Liverpool University for treatment, after which a protocol is drawn up to apply the cream. The cream is cytotoxic (toxic to cells) and therefore must be applied by a vet. Normal protocols would be 5 treatments spread over 10-12 days, after which the sarcoid should slowly scab and lift.
4. Banding. Special thick elastic bands are applied to the stalk of the tumour to cut off the blood supply to the main bulk. These can be effective, but require a certain shape and size of tumour, and it can take some time for the sarcoid to fall off. Re-growth may be more common with this method.



There are other methods of treating sarcoids, such as local radiation/chemotherapy/BCG vaccination. These may be appropriate especially on a sarcoid occurring near an eye. Please speak to your vet if you have any questions about a specific sarcoid.



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